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SECOND VOLUME

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WITHIN THE PRECINCTS

BY

MRS OLIPHANT

AUTHORESS OF 'THE CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD' ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1879

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE MUSICIAN AT HOME.

THE Signor's house was one of those which, when general peacefulness had made the battlements round St. Michael's unnecessary, had grown within the outer wall. It was more like a growth than a building. Windows which looked, as we have said, as if cut in the side of a precipice, gave light to the small panelled chambers which were connected by bits of quaint passages, here and there by a little flight of stairs, with tiny vestibules and landing-places, wasting the little space there was. Room after room had no doubt been added as necessity arose, and each new room had to be connected somehow with the others. The house occupied more space than a comfortable ugly modern house with tolerably sized rooms would have done, and when the Signor came into possession

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it had been a miracle of picturesque awkwardness, not a room in it capable of holding more than three or four people at a time, yet as many rooms as would have lodged a dozen—the least possible use for the greatest possible expenditure of space. The Signor, however, had built on the inner side a dining-room in red brick, which made existence possible, though it failed in the point of beauty. To tell the truth, the musician's dining-room was an eyesore to all the antiquaries and all the critics. Nobody knew by what neglect of the architect, by what partiality of the Board of Works, it had been permitted to be built. It was of no style at all, neither Gothic, like the original building, nor Queen Anne, like the fashion. He had failed in his duty in every respect. It was a square box with a large window filling up one side. It was lighted with gas. It had red curtains in bold and uncompromising rep, and a large mahogany sideboard of the worst period. How he had been allowed to build this monstrosity nobody knew. It had been made the subject of a painful discussion in the Chapter itself, where Canon Skeffington (the Honble. and Revd.) complained so bitterly of the injury done to his best principles and highest feelings, that the Dean was irritated, and took up the cudgels on his side on behalf of his favourite musician.

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'He has a right, I suppose, to make himself comfortable like the rest of us,' the head of the community said. 'No right to make my life a burden to me,' said the Honourable Canon; and, he added, almost weeping, 'I cannot look out of my window without seeing the thing. You talk at your ease, you others——' But what was to be done? The Chapter could not take so bold a step as to invade the rights of private property, tear down the Signor's red curtains, burn his sideboard, destroy his walls. He had to be left to the enjoyment of his villanous erection. The Signor laughed in his sleeve, but in public was remorseful, bemoaning his own ignorance of art, and declaring that if he could afford it, rather than give pain to Canon Skeffington——but then he could not afford it—and what was to be done? He kept his dining-room, which was big enough to accommodate his friends, but for himself the Signor had better taste than he professed to have. His favourite sitting-room was in the same position and had the same view as that of his housekeeper, but its window was between two buttresses of the wall, which held in their gigantic arms a little square shelf of green turf, a small projection of the hill, which above and below was covered with masonry, leaving this little ledge of grass, like one of the hanging gardens of Scripture,

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hung high in the air above the town and the landscape. The Signor's window opened upon this little terrace. His room within was low and dark, but in summer at least this mattered little, for its dim light and shadowy walls made a pleasant shelter, like a bower in a wood, from the lightness and brightness outside. There was a heavy beam across the roof, from which hung a little chandelier of old Venice glass, reflected in a tall old mirror among the oak panels over the mantelpiece, and not much more bright than they were. On one side were the carved doors of a cupboard in the wall, which was full of old music, the Signor's chief treasures, and on the other was a range of low bookshelves, also filled with music books of every size and kind. The piano stood in the corner near the window, with the keyboard close to the light. There were a few chairs about the room, and a writing-table piled with papers. This was all the furniture of the dim little chamber, and it was impossible to imagine a greater contrast than existed between it and the new building which had so shocked Canon Skeffington. And the Signor was not in this particular much unlike his house. A touch of sentiment, which some people were disposed to call high-flown, mingled in him with a curious undercurrent of cynicism, which few people sus-

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pected at all. He liked to jar upon the Canon Skeffingtons of existence and ruffle their tempers and their finest feelings. But in his heart he had feelings equally fine, and was as easily *froissé* as they. He mocked at them on the very points in which he himself was weak, affecting an insensibility which he did not feel, building the vile modern room with profound enjoyment of their delicate distress, but retiring out of it himself to the shelter of this dim romantic chamber. The combination was very like the Signor.

On this particular evening, when young Purcell went to call for lights, the Signor was seated out on his little terrace enjoying the twilight and a cigarette together. There were two chairs on the scrap of grass, and a little table with an inkstand upon it, and the cup in which the Signor had taken his black coffee after dinner. He was leaning back in his chair puffing out the fragrant smoke from his cigarette, lazily watching it as it floated upwards, and now and then noting down a bar or two of music upon a piece of paper in his hand. Sometimes he took the cigarette from his mouth and hummed a scrap of an air, keeping time with his head and hand. There was no one who was more popular in the country as a composer of graceful drawing-room songs than Signor

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Rossinetti. It was something refined, something elegant that was expected from him, delicate soprano melodies, fine combinations for tenors and altos. It was very seldom that he took any trouble about the bass, but his tenor songs were justly considered exquisite. He liked to have a pretty set of verses on hand, and 'set' them in the intervals of more serious business. The summer evening, when he sat out after dinner upon his scrap of terrace, was the time when he had most inspiration. His pupil and *protégé*, young Purcell, thought there was no intellectual pleasure higher and more elevating, than to sit out here in the shadow of the great grey buttresses, with the cheerful distant noises of the High Street floating upward from the foot of the wall, and to watch the Signor composing his song. The young fellow would run in to the piano and 'try over' every line of the symphony as it came welling out from that fount of music. He said often that, except one thing, there was no such delight in the world. To see genius working under his very eyes, what a privilege it was! To Purcell it seemed that his master read his heart, and uttered his deepest sentiments for him in those compositions. To-night his mind had been lulled out of great commotion and disturbance by the rosy vision of love and

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happiness that had breathed through the notes. It was glad, it was sad, it was full of suggestion, it wrung the very heart of Purcell—'*'*Twas in the time of roses, they plucked them as they passed.' Would that time ever come for him? He thought the Signor had read the depths of his heart, the wistful longing which was sometimes hope and sometimes despair, the pictures he made to himself of one day wandering by *her* side, one day gathering roses for her. He murmured over and over the tune of the refrain in a kind of ecstasy as he went to his mother's room, his fancy excited, his head all on fire, half with the delicious sense of being friend to such a genius, and sharing, as it were, the very inspiration that produced such beautiful things —and half with the pride and delight of being so deeply in love and hanging on so exquisite an edge of anguish. The Signor himself did not know how much those pretty compositions of his went to his pupil's heart; but he was flattered—as who would not be?—by this never-failing appreciation of his work, and youthful enthusiasm. It pleased him vaguely, just as the floating sounds from below, the voices and noises, all softened by the warm air of the summer evening, and even by the dimness of the twilight, pleased him. How harmonious they became as they soared upwards, all that

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was harsh taken out of them, filling the solitude with a genial sense of human fellowship! Perhaps the Signor was, like many others, not too fond of his fellow-creatures close at hand; but as they went and came, far down at his feet, talking, calling to each other, shouting their wares, singing now and then, making a sound of their steps upon the pavement, and a movement of their breathing in the air, he was transported with the hum, and felt that he loved them. This always gave him inspiration, this and the glimmer of the river and of the distant villages scattered over the plain, throwing up here and there a dim point of a spire among the trees. When Purcell left him, he put aside the bit of music-paper on which he had been jotting down his chords. He raised his eyes to the profound unfathomable blue above, and swung back upon his chair. He was half giddy with the sense of circling depths of infinity above him, though himself raised so high. The Signor was not without a feeling that he was raised very high, not only in locality, but in soul; yet there was a heaven above which made his head giddy when he looked up—a heaven full of stars, from Palestrina to Mendelssohn, all shining over him, serene, unapproachable, not even holding out any encouragement to him, passive and splendid as the other stars

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which hid themselves in that still-luminous blue. Would any one ever look up at that sky and recall his name as also among the ranks of the unapproachable? The Signor turned his eyes from it with a sigh as he heard some one enter the room, and came down to earth, letting his chair drop upon its four legs, and his mind return to the present. He watched through the open window the advent of old Pickering carrying the lamp. The old man put it down on the table, and lighted some candles on the mantelpiece in front of the dim mirror, which gave them back with a blurred, enlarged reflection. His master sat outside and watched him pottering about the room, setting the chairs against the wall, and vainly attempting to make everything 'straight.' It was a standing grievance to old Pick that he was not allowed to close the window and draw the curtains as it was right to do. The Signor outside sat and watched him with a gentle amusement. He liked to feel the oddness and superiority of his own tastes, thrown into evidence by the mighty anxiety of old Pick to shut the window. A smile came over his face. To ordinary mortals, in ordinary houses, it was not necessary to seek inspiration from the skies and the wide world of evening air. As Pick approached the window, with his usual look of wistful anxiety

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to be allowed to do what was right, and tacit disapproval of lawless habits, the Signor stepped through, smiling. 'I think you will shut me out some night, Pick,' he said, 'and then you will have my blood on your soul—for what could I do upon the terrace? I should fall asleep and tumble over, and be picked up in little pieces at the foot of the hill.'

'Ah! I don't feel no fear of that, sir,' said Pickering, shaking his head; 'you've got too good a voice for that, sir. I don't make no doubt that you could hold an A sharp till you frighted the whole Abbey. And besides I always looks out; I've got the habit in this house. Even the girl, she'll go and stand at the window, as if the view was any matter to her; it's a thing as carries one away. But I don't hold with leaving all open when the lights are lighted. Bless you, the top windows in the street with a spyglass, or even with good eyes like what I had when I was young, they could see in.'

'Much good it would do them,' said the Signor, sitting down before his piano. And indeed it is quite true that as he sat close to the window, relieved against the light of the lamp within, there were eyes at the top windows opposite which could catch with difficulty the outline of the Signor's pale profile and black mous-

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tache. Some of the young ladies in the shops would climb up occasionally and show that exciting prospect to a friend. But it was an amusement which palled after the first moment, and certainly did no harm to the Signor.

'Maybe not much good, sir,' said old Pick, who always would have the last word; 'but it might do harm. You never can tell what folks will say. The less they know the more they'll talk; and that's true all the world over; though I will say for the Abbey as it's as bad or worse than most other places.'

'Why should it be worse, Pick?'

'I don't know, sir—unless it's the clergy and the chevaliers. You see, when gentlemen has little or nothing to do, they're brought down to the level of the women, so far as that goes—and as gentlemen always does things more thorough than the women when they're once started, the consequence nat'rally is—Leastways that's my notion of it,' said Pick;—'the women haven't the strength to start a real talking as does harm. They tries hard—as hard as they knows how—but bless you, in that as in most things, they wants a man to show 'em the way.'

'That is a new view, Pick. I thought if there was one thing in which the ladies had the advantage of us——'

'There ain't one thing, sir, not one. For

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my part, I can tell in a minute a story as will hang together, a real crusher, one as will drive folks distracted and ruin a family. You'll never get that out of a woman's tongue. Nay, nay, they hasn't the force for it; they're poor creatures at the best; they can make a person uncomfortable, but they can't do no more. And when I say the Abbey's as bad or maybe worse, I mean that the gentlemen has little to do, and they has to amuse themselves the same as the women. That's what I mean to say.'

The Signor gave a half attention to Pick's long speech while he sat at his piano. All the time he was running over his new composition with one hand, correcting a note here and there, changing a harmony. ''Twas in the time of roses—the time of roses,' he hummed softly under his breath. But the smile on his lip was for Pick, and he gave him a negligent half attention, amused by his chatter, and by the peculiar views he held forth. He looked up at him as Pick stopped, singing with a little flourish in the accompaniment, which meant satisfaction in having at last got the phrase to his mind—''Twas in the time of roses—the time of roses——' Old Pick was not surprised by the utterance of a sentiment so foreign to his subject. He knew his master's ways, and he took a certain interest in his master's productions,

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such as old servants often benevolently accord to the doings of their 'family.' He could not tell what folks saw in them—still, as the Signor's productions, he looked upon them with kindly toleration all the same.

'You may say, sir,' he cried, '"the time o' roses"—that's just the very thing; for, I daresay, but for that rose in his button-hole, and the jaunty looks of him, a young girl wouldn't have seen nothing in him. But I don't know neither—women is the queerest things on the face of this whole earth. Flatter them, or make them think they're bettering themselves, and there's nothing they won't do.'

'Who is it that wears flowers in his button-hole?' said the Signor. He wore them himself, and he was curious and slightly excited, wondering if any gossip could by any chance have got up about himself. The idea of such a thing kindled him into interest; his right hand dropped off from the piano, though with the other hand he kept softly sounding notes in the bass, and he turned towards his old servant with a look of animation altogether new. What interest is there like that with which one anticipates hearing something about oneself?

But at this moment Purcell's steps were heard coming quickly along the passage, and he came in with his head erect, and his eyes

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gleaming, and pushed old Pick out of his way. 'That will do, Pick,' he said, with a glimmer of impatience, 'that will do! I will set things right for the master, myself.'

'What is the matter, boy?'

'Matter or no matter, if you think I'll leave it to the first that comes to look after my master—' said old Pick, standing his ground. He would not yield; he was very friendly in general to Mr. John, and ready to do what he ordered, but there are limits to everything. He stood his ground steadily, arranging and re-arranging the papers on the table, while young Purcell went forward to the Signor. The young fellow put himself behind the musician, between him and the window, and stooped to whisper in his ear. His glowing eyes, his eager aspect, made a great impression on the Signor, who was very impressionable. He was possessed by some new thought. 'Master,' he said, breathless, 'I have a hundred things to say to you. I have heard something new. I want your advice, I want your help.' He was breathless, as if he had been running a race, though all he had really done had been to come along a few yards of passage. The Signor was easily moved by the sight of emotion, and he was fond of his *protégé*. 'Go, Pick,' he said immediately, 'and bring us some tea.'

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'Tea, sir!' said the old man in consternation. 'You never takes it. If it's nothing but to get rid of old Pick, I'll go. I'll go; never fear but I'll go.'

'I want some tea,' said the Signor authoritatively; 'foolish old man, would you spoil my new song for want of a cup of tea? Go to Mrs. Purcell, and tell her, with my compliments, I want some of her special brew—the very best, as she used to make it for me when I had headaches. Quick, my head threatens to ache now. Well! what is it, boy? Has the Queen sent for you to be the head of her orchestra, or is the Dean coming to pay us a visit? It must be something very important to judge by your face.'

'Oh, sir,' cried young Purcell, 'what a heart you have! making up a headache and a whole story to save old Pick's feelings—and me that am really no better than he is, pushing him out of the way!'

'Nobody is any better than any other,' said the Signor in his measured tones. 'I have tried to teach you so all your life. But I will allow that some are worse than others,' he added, with a smile. His disciple was too much occupied, however, with the urgency of his own case to notice what he said.

'Master,' said the young man, 'I have hur-

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ried back to tell you I have changed my mind; I will take the organ at Sturminster after all.'

An almost imperceptible change came over the Signor's face—that slight stiffening of the muscles of the mouth—continuance of the easy and genial smile of real satisfaction into the forced and uncomfortable one of pretended equanimity—which is the sign above all others of disappointment and displeasure, became visible in his face. 'Well——' he said slowly; 'why not—if you think it will be more to your advantage? After all, that is the grand test.'

'It is not that,' said young Purcell, shrinking a little; 'you can't think that I would leave you only for my advantage. No, master, it is not that. You must hear it all before you judge.'

'Certainly,' said the Signor. He kept the same smile rigid upon his face. 'And in the meantime here is old Pick with the tea,' he added, 'and we must drink it for the sake of his feelings. What, Pick, is it made already? I don't think your mother can be so careful as usual, boy, about her brew.'

'I don't put no faith in tea that stands long to draw, sir,' said Pick. 'I like it myself with all the scent in it. Water as boils hard, and not a minute lost. That's my maxim. It's fresh made with plenty of tea in, and I'll warrant it good. Smell that,' he said, taking off

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the lid of the teapot. The Signor listened to him quietly, taking no notice of Purcell's impatience. He smiled on the old man and let him talk. He was wounded and offended by his pupil's sudden change after the decision of an hour ago; and though he had a great desire to hear what reason could be given for this difference of feeling, his annoyance and disgust at the change found expression in this apparent carelessness of it. He kept Pick talking with secret malice, while Purcell fretted. The young fellow did not know how to contain himself. He collected the music-books that were on the piano, and put them back on the shelves. Then he took them down again; he shifted the candles; he roamed from corner to corner, moving the chairs about, throwing into disorder the things on the table; now and then he cast a piteous look at his master; but the Signor sat, in serene malice sounding the bass notes in his accompaniment, putting artful questions to old Pickering, and leading him on to talk. It was the old man himself at length who brought the suspense to an end by recollecting something it was necessary for him to do. 'They'd have kep' me there all night,' he said to Mrs. Purcell, with pretended impatience, as he got back to the housekeeper's room. 'Dear!' said Mrs. Purcell, astonished; she could not

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understand how the Signor could waste time talking to old Pick at a moment so momentous for her John.

When old Pickering was gone, the Signor still said nothing. He turned to the piano and began to play; he was like a woman offended, who will not approach the subject on which she is dying to be informed. At last Purcell, approaching humbly with wistful eyes, ventured to put one hand lightly upon his arm.

'Master,' said the young man, 'let me speak to you. I cannot do anything till I have spoken to you.'

'To me, boy? Speak then, as much as you please,' said the Signor, nodding at him with an air of ingenuous wonder while he rang out the end of the melody. ''Twas in the time of roses,' he sang; then swinging himself round on his stool, 'You want to speak to me? Why didn't you say so sooner? Speak then, I am all attention,' he said.

Then Purcell began, once more breathless with agitation and excitement: 'I think there seems a chance for me, sir,' he said; 'my mother has just been telling me. It is such a chance as never may happen again. You know I love St. Michael's better than anything in the world —except one thing. Master, *she* is in trouble; her home is about to be made impossible to

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her; now or never; if I had a home to offer her, she might accept it. This is why I said I would take Sturminster. St. Ermengilde is more to my mind, a thousand times more to my mind; and to be near you, to have the benefit of your advice, that would be everything for me. But, dear master,' said the young man, 'must I not think of her first? and here is a chance for me, perhaps the only chance I may have in my life.'

'Has anything happened to Miss Despard?' said the Signor in great surprise. He recognised the justice of the plea, and he listened with great interest and sympathy, and a curious feeling which was neither sympathy nor interest. Lottie was to the Signor a mysterious creature, exciting an altogether different kind of feeling from that which he felt for his pupil. He was almost sentimentally attached to his pupil, and entered into the history and prospects of his love with an enthusiasm quite unlike that with which a mature Englishman generally interests himself in anybody's love-affairs. But along with this sentiment there existed another almost directly opposite to it, an interest in Lottie as a being of a totally different class from Purcell, of whom it would be profoundly curious to know the history, and the means by which she might perhaps be brought to look favourably on—nay,

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to marry—Purcell; which seemed to the Signor quite 'on the cards.' How she might be brought to this, in what way she would reconcile herself to be Purcell's wife; how she would bow a spirit, evidently so proud, to the young musician's origin and to his ways of talking, which, though refined enough, were still at the bottom those of a man whose mother was 'in service:' all this was captivating as a matter of study to the Signor; he got, or expected to get, a great deal of amusement out of it, expecting that Lottie's struggles in fitting herself for the position would be wonderful enough: so that his interest cannot be called entirely benevolent. But between this keen and half-malign interest and the sentimental interest he took in Purcell's 'happiness,' it may be imagined that the crisis was nearly as exciting to him as it was to Purcell himself. He listened to the story with the warmest interest, and agreed that there was nothing for it but to accept Sturminster. 'But you must not lose a day,' he said; 'you must secure the lady at once, there is not a moment to lose.'

'Secure?' Purcell said, growing red and growing white; 'then you think there is a hope, a—likelihood——'

'Think? I think there is an almost certainty! cried the Signor. He became quite

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excited himself for the sake of his pupil and for his own sake, for the keen intellectual interest he felt in this curious problem as to what Lottie would do. 'You must go to-morrow,' he cried, with all the eagerness of a personal interest; 'you must not lose a single day.'

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CHAPTER XVIII.

YOUNG PURCELL.

NEXT morning found young Purcell in a state of excitement and nervous agitation still greater than that of the previous night. He had not slept during the natural time for sleep, and in consequence, according to the fashion of youth unaccustomed to watching, had fallen very fast and heavily asleep, out of sheer fatigue in the morning, waking only with an indescribable sense of guilt to hear the bells ringing for the morning service in the Abbey. Such a thing had never happened to him before, and his shame and sense of wrong-doing were more than reason. He jumped up in dismay, but even the most hurried toilet could not get him in time; and his mother appeared at his door as he prepared to rush out half-dressed, preventing his exit. 'You wouldn't go out without your breakfast?' she cried with horror. The virtuous and carefully regulated life of the chorister and musical student trained under the Signor's eye and his mother's constant care, had

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made a late morning and an omitted breakfast seem like something criminal. Besides, a sense of the crisis had got into the air. The Signor had left an anxious message, begging his *protégé* not to hurry himself, to take his time, and to keep up his courage. His mother kissed him wistfully, and served him with a noble breakfast, as if he wanted strengthening in the most material way, for the important piece of work before him. Even old Pick looked at him with respectful curiosity as at a man on the edge of a very serious step indeed, a curiosity mingled with awe and a little grim humour and admiration. The boy was going to do what Pick had never had the courage to do; and though the old man thought the young one a fool, and hugged himself on his superior wisdom, yet it cannot be denied that he looked with a certain respect on the bold youth who was about to make such a venture. He put his breakfast on the table, not grudging the trouble, though the Signor's breakfast had long been over, and he shook his head behind Mr. John's chair. 'Take a good breakfast, it will do you a deal of good,' he said, as he left the hero of the occasion. Purcell, though his mother was only the housekeeper, was the son of the house; he took his meals with the master, though it was his mother who prepared their dishes in the kitchen. It was a

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false position, perhaps, but he had not yet found any trouble in it. He had been a little curly-headed boy in the choir when Mrs. Purcell came first to take charge of the Signor's house; she had been the sole servant then, and had scrubbed and brushed and cooked, diligently keeping everything in order. Old Pickering had gone through the same sort of training which had made John Purcell a gentleman. He, too, had been a chorister, and had progressed into a lay-clerk, with possibilities of rising to something better. But Pick was one of the unsuccessful ones; his voice failed him, his science never had been great, and a little after Mrs. Purcell's advent he had come to the Signor also to be provided for. The organist had a large heart and a somewhat indolent temper; the easiest way to provide for the old singing-man was to take him into his own household, and this was what had been done. As for Pick, he had settled very easily into his new place, having been the son of the master of a little tavern; and though it cost him an effort to acknowledge the little soprano, whose surplice he had put on so often, in the light of a young master, yet the effort was made. Pick was conscientious, he did not do anything by halves; and the first time that the Signor's pupil was permitted to play the voluntary in the Abbey, the old man

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made his fellow-servants jump, and gave the youth a shock of mingled alarm and pleasure, by suddenly addressing him as Mr. John. Nobody had expected such an heroic act of submission, but Pick knew his place and all that was suitable in the circumstances. 'Him as the Signor puts in his own place has a right to be respected,' he said; and he never wavered in that noble self-abnegation, nor let any one suppose that it was painful to him. All this had happened long before the period of which we are writing; but what sensation, what emotion, it had caused at the time! Pick stood now, pausing behind the young musician's chair, and lifted up his hands and shook his head. To think this boy, whom he had, so to speak, brought up, should show so much courage! Pick himself had never made such a venture, nor even the Signor, who was the master of both; and yet this boy was going to do it. The old man shook his head, not knowing what might come of it; but in his heart he felt a respect reaching to admiration, for the courage which was so much beyond anything he had ever known.

Courage, however, was the last quality in which, on this particular morning, young Purcell could be said to excel. To devote your life in secret to a beloved object; to dream of her

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night and day; to make impassioned resolutions, and determine to win glory and wealth for her, is not so hard for a fanciful youth; but to go into her presence, look into the face that dazzles you—confront the goddess of your distant worship, and without any preliminaries to lead up to this great step, and prepare her for it, quite off-hand and impromptu ask her to marry you! This is a very different matter. The young man sat alone and tried to eat his breakfast, trembling to think of what was before him. The circumstances were such as to add tenfold to the natural tremors of such a crisis. She was a lady, and far above him—not rich indeed, nor occupying any very exalted position in reality—but her dignity was very imposing to the young man, who had always recognised this grace of what seemed to him rank, as one of her particular charms. Purcell was painfully aware that he himself had no right to the name of gentleman. Many a less worthy claimant has borne it, with no thought that it was inappropriate, and Purcell had anxiously and painfully endeavoured to acquire all its outside appearances. He knew, as well as any, how to behave himself in society, and passed muster very well among other young men. He was a little over-anxious, perhaps, a little too fine in his lan-

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guage, too deferential and polite, not sufficiently at his ease, to get much enjoyment out of his social experiences; but this was a fault on the right side. Notwithstanding his modest sense of his own 'merits,' Purcell could not persuade himself that he was Lottie's equal. He knew he was not her equal. She had been as a star to him, far away and out of reach—and though in the fervour of imaginative passion the hope of winning her had seemed like heaven, yet the actual enterprise of wooing her, when brought thus close, seemed very appalling indeed—a quest more dangerous and alarming than ever knight errant set forth upon. His knees knocked together, great beads of moisture came upon his forehead—how was he to do it? how was he to present himself, to explain the hopes which, looked at thus in cold blood, appeared even to himself impossible, not to say presumptuous in the highest degree? How was he ever, he asked himself, to make her aware what he meant? She would not understand him. She would think he meant something else, anything else—rather than that he, a poor musician, the son of the Signor's housekeeper, wanted to MARRY her, the daughter of a gentleman. It would be impossible to make her understand him. This seemed the first difficulty of all, and it was an appalling one. She

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would not even know what he meant. In this respect indeed Purcell was mistaken, for Lottie already knew well enough what were the hopes in his heart—resenting them highly as one of the wrongs of fate against her; but this he had no way of knowing. If he could but have got anyone to smooth the way for him, to tell what it was he wanted to say, to set him a-going, he thought he could find eloquence enough to carry him on—but how could he make that *premier pas?* Thus, while the household was all expectant, excited by what was coming, Purcell sat over his breakfast and trembled, too frightened to move or think, though with a consciousness that this desperate step must be taken. The Signor in the Abbey, rolling forth melodious thunders out of the organ, kept thinking of him with a smile, and a half sigh. Like Pick, he had a certain admiration for the valour of the boy thus pushing forward before himself into the mysteries of life; but the Signor's thoughts were more tender and less cynical than those of his servant. He could not help wondering how it was that in his own person he had let all such chances slip. How was it? As he followed his pupil in imagination to the feet of his love, that young creature seemed very fair, very much to be desired. No doubt, to have such a one by your side, sharing your

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life with you, would make existence bear a very different appearance. Why was it he had never done what Purcell was going to do? This question seemed to flow into the music he was playing, and to go circling round and round the Abbey in the morning sunshine. Why? Life was endurable enough, a calm sort of routine, with now and then a pleasurable sensation in it, but nothing more; and no doubt it might have been made more of. The Signor could not answer his own question. He did not want to make himself the rival of his pupil, or to do anything similar to what young Purcell was doing. He had no wish to make any violent change in life, which was well enough as it was. But only it was odd that a simple fellow like John Purcell should thus boldly have pushed before him into a completer existence—very odd; the boy was bold. Whether he succeeded or not, his very agitation and ardour had in them a higher touch of emotion than any that had been in the life of his master. He laughed within himself at the boy's temerity—but the laugh was mingled with a sigh.

And Mrs. Purcell, for her part, was in high excitement, longing for her boy to be gone on his errand, longing for him to be back again. That her John should marry a lady was the climax of grandeur and happiness. To be sure,

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it ought to have been a rich lady or great lady. He deserved a princess, his mother felt. Still, as things were, it was a kind of intoxication to think even of the daughter of a Chevalier. Why did he linger, as if breakfast was worth thinking of? She listened for every sound, for the door shutting, for his step in the hall, and was very cross when Maryanne made a noise, so that she could not hear what was going on upstairs. As for old Pick, he brushed Mr. John's hat with a grim smile on his face, and hung about the hall to watch him go out.

'The young un's off at last,' he said with a chuckle, marching into the kitchen: when just before the end of the service in the Abbey, when all the air about was ringing with the echo of the Amens, Purcell at last screwed his courage to the sticking-point, and went out, to meet his fate.

Poor young fellow, he could not have been more alarmed had he gone to face a lion instead of a lady. The lion would have been nothing. He would have called out for succour, and used whatever weapons he could lay hold of; but nobody could help him with Lottie—no shield would cover him from the lightnings of her eyes. It was all embarrassing, all terrible; even if by any chance things should turn out in his favour, he did not know what he should do.

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What could he call her? Not Lottie, that was too familiar. Not Miss Despard. All these different and disjointed thoughts seemed to float about his head in the maze of excitement he was in—he was past thinking, but such questions kept floating in and out of his mind. It was the most extraordinary relief when, going to the door of Captain Despard's house, he found that Lottie was out. If she had been there, it seemed to Purcell that he would have run away—but she was not there. He asked when she was expected back and went on, recovering his breath. He could not go home again, where presently the Signor would come from the Abbey and question him. The service, however, was not so nearly over as he thought. It was a saint's day, and there was a sermon. The precincts were very still and deserted, for most people were at church. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, sitting at her window, saw the young musician walk across the broad silent sunshine, but he did not see her. He went up the Dean's walk, hearing his own step echo through the silence, and past the Deanery, and out upon the slopes beyond. It was shady and sweet under the trees, which rose up close against the old wall—and all was very quiet during the time of matins, though the town went on with its usual hum down below at the foot of the

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hill. Purcell began to recover himself a little and take breath as he came to this shelter and refuge. Many a time had he strayed under these trees, thinking of *her*, wondering if he ever might be able to approach her. It was strange to be here, however, in the morning, the hour of work and engagements, which he never had to himself, and to hear the far-off sound of the organ pealing out after the sermon was over. All the common occupations of life seemed to be suspended for Purcell. He felt as ordinary men feel on an occasional stolen Sunday, when work is suspended, and the duty of church-going put aside. All was so sweet, and serene, and still—no one to disturb his thoughts: the sound of the organ in the distance keeping him aware of the fact that he was singularly, unprecedentedly liberated from his usual occupations: and the tremor of agitation dying away into an excitement which was more bearable, which left room for all the sweeter musings, of which *she* was the centre. He sat down on the root of a tree, and let himself breathe. Then came the first notes of the voluntary, and a distant hum as of the congregation dispersing. Few people were likely to come here at this hour in the morning, but still Purcell felt that he had but a moment in which to indulge himself, and that soon he must turn back.

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As he sat thus trying to collect himself, a sudden sound close by, the rustle of a dress among the bushes, the soft sound of a footstep caught his ear. He looked up—and his heart jumped into his throat. There She stood before him, a little basket in her hand. There was a by-way into the town by the slopes, and Lottie had been about her marketing. She was in her usual simple morning frock, clean print and nothing more, and though her head was sufficiently full of dreams and her mind of anxieties, she was at present lingering upon neither, but going straight from one place to another, as became the active morning hour and the consciousness of various things to do. When she saw Purcell spring to his feet suddenly in the midst of the path, for the moment Lottie was startled. She made him a little gracious but indifferent sign of recognition, as courtesy required—for ridiculous as were the notions in his head, she could not be rude to him—and was passing on, not wanting any further parley, when she was struck by the agitation in his face. He was staring at her as if she had been a ghost—his mouth was open, his breath coming quick, his colour changing. Excitement did not improve his appearance. She had almost laughed, then checked herself remorsefully, and became so much the more

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sympathetic for her temporary movement of mirth.

'Is there anything the matter?' she said kindly. 'I am afraid you are ill. Has anything —gone wrong?' She did not know what to say, he looked at her with such solemn eyes.

'Oh, nothing—nothing has gone wrong. I am not ill. Miss Despard—I did not expect to see you here.'

'No—but I hope it is not I who have frightened you,' said Lottie. 'I sometimes go to the Bridge road this way.'

'You have not frightened me,' said Purcell, who found it easier to repeat her words than to say anything original; 'but I—did not know you went this way.'

It was all that Lottie could do, once more, to keep herself from laughing. She gave him a little nod, and was about to pass, saying, 'What a lovely morning it is!' the stereotyped English remark; when he made a hurried step after her, and, holding up his hands, entreated her, in a piteous voice, to stay a moment. 'Miss Despard —what startled me was that I was looking for you. Oh, stay a moment, and let me speak to you!' he said.

Lottie stood still, arrested in her progress, throwing a wondering look upon him. What could he want with her? Her first glance was

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simple surprise—her second—Was it possible he could mean *that*?—could he be bold enough, rash enough? Next moment she blushed for her own folly. To be afraid of young Purcell! That was foolishness indeed. She stood still there, one foot put out to go on, her basket in her hand.

'Please say what it is, Mr. Purcell. I have got something to do. I ought to be at home.'

The morning is not the moment for a love tale. How much more congenial would have been the evening, the twilight, the subdued poetic hour, after the sun had disappeared, that great busybody who shows every imperfection, and is himself so perpetually moving on! Something to do was in every line of Lottie's energetic figure. She had no time for lingering, nor wish to linger. 'Please say what it is.' Only business should be treated in this summary way, not love.

'Miss Despard,' said the young musician, whose limbs were trembling under him, 'I wanted to say a great deal to you; it is very important—for me. Things are going well with me,' he added, with desperation, after a momentary pause. 'I have been appointed to a church—a fine church—with a good instrument. They are to give me a good salary, and they say I can

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have as much teaching as I like. I shall be very well off.'

'I am glad to hear you are so fortunate,' said Lottie. Her eyes were full of surprise, and for a moment there was a gleam of amusement in them. That he should waylay her to tell her this, seemed a curious piece of ostentation or folly. 'I am very glad,' she repeated; 'but you must forgive me if I have to hasten home, for I have a great many things to do.'

'One moment,' he said, putting out his hand to stop her. 'That was not all. The Signor thinks—you know the Signor, Miss Despard, there is not a better musician in the country—he thinks I will make progress. He thinks I may rise—as high as any one can rise in our profession. He tells me I may be a rich man yet before I die.'

'Indeed, I hope all he says will come true,' said Lottie; 'but why you should take the trouble to tell me——.'

Then suddenly she caught his eye, and stopped short, and blushed an angry red. She saw what was coming in a moment, which did not, however, prevent her from drawing herself up with a great deal of dignity, and adding, 'I don't know what you mean.'

'Miss Despard,' he said with a gasp, 'there is no comparison between me and you. But

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you are not so well off—not happy. They say —you know how people will talk—that there is something going to happen that will make you very uncomfortable.'

'Stop!' she said, with an involuntary cry, half of anger, half of amazement. Then she laughed. 'Do you want me to acknowledge that you are much better off than I am?' she said; 'but there is no need to compare you with me.'

'It could not be done, Miss Lottie. I know it could not be done. You are a lady, and far above me. I know I am not your equal—in some things.'

Lottie began to be too angry to laugh, but yet she was provoked to ridicule, which is the keenest of weapons. She made him a little mocking curtsey. 'It is very kind of you to say so, I am sure, for we are quite poor people, Mr. Purcell; not fortunate, and getting on in the world like you.'

'No, Miss Despard,' he said, simply, 'that was just what I wanted to say. If you had been as well off as I could wish, I should not have ventured to say anything. I have always loved you, and thought of you above all the world. Since you first came to St. Michael's, I have never thought of any one but you. It has been my hope that some time or other I might be

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able to—but it was only just yesterday that I heard something that made me settle—two things——'

She did not speak, being, indeed, too angry and annoyed for speech; but she felt a kind of contemptuous, wrathful interest in what he was saying, and curiosity to know what it was that had induced him to make this venture; and, accordingly, gave him a glance, in which there was an impatient question. Purcell was not too discriminating. He felt encouraged by being listened to, from whatsoever motive.

'Two things,' he said, with stolid steadiness. 'One, to take Sturminster. I had settled before I would not take it, but St. Ermengilde's. But when I heard *that*, I changed my mind, though it did not please the Signor. Sturminster will make me independent; it will give me a home. And then I settled to tell you, Miss Lottie: if you are uncomfortable at home, if you don't like things that may be going to happen: to tell you that there's another home ready for you, if you will have it; a home that may be made very comfortable; a place of your own, to do what you like with, that will be waiting for you, whenever you please, at a moment's notice, the sooner the better. If you would say yes, I would go directly, I would go to-morrow, and prepare; and nobody would be able to give you

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trouble or make you uncomfortable any longer. Only say the word, and there is nothing, nothing I would not do——'

Lottie stood and gazed at him, wondering, bitterly ashamed and humiliated, and yet not without a sense that so much simple devotion was worth more than to be crushed, or scorned, or flung from her, as she wished to fling it. She restrained herself with an effort. 'What do you mean?' she said. 'Is it possible that you are asking me to *marry* you, Mr. Purcell? That cannot be what you mean.'

'What else could it be?' he said, turning on her a look of genuine surprise. 'You don't suppose, Miss Despard, that I could be thinking of anything else?'

His cheeks grew crimson, and so did hers. A cry of anger and shame and confusion came from her breast. She stamped her foot impatiently on the ground. 'You would never, never have ventured to ask me, never, if I had not been helpless and friendless and poor!'

'No,' he said again, with a simplicity in which she could not help feeling a certain nobleness. 'I would not have ventured, for I am not what you call a gentleman; but when I heard you were in trouble, I could not keep silent. I thought to myself, Miss Lottie shall

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not be unhappy because of having no home to go to——'

'Oh!' said Lottie, putting out her hand to stop him. She could not bear any more. Her heart was sick with the mortification of such a suit. She could have crushed and trampled upon her humble lover, in rage and shame, and yet she could not but see the generosity and truth in his heart. If he had been less worthy, it would have been less hard upon her. 'It is not a thing that can be,' she cried hastily. 'Oh, don't say another word. I know you are kind, but it is not a thing that can be.'

'Not now?' he said, looking at her wistfully; 'well: but perhaps another time? perhaps when you need it more—I am not in any hurry. Perhaps I am young to marry; the Signor thinks so. But another time, Miss Lottie? Whenever you want me, you have but to say the word.'

'Oh, don't think of it. I will never, never say the word. Forget it altogether, Mr. Purcell. I am very, very much obliged to you, but indeed it can never be.'

The young man's countenance fell. Then he recovered himself. 'I can't think you are taking everything into consideration. We should have a nice home, plenty of everything,

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and I should never spare trouble to give you everything you were used to——'

'Oh, go away, go away!' she cried.

And as they stood there, some one else, his shadow slowly moving before him, came round the corner of the pathway, among the chestnut-trees; and Purcell felt that his opportunity was over. He was not sorry for it. He had done what was set before him, and if he had not succeeded, he was not discouraged. There was still hope for another time.

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CHAPTER XIX.

BUSINESS, OR LOVE?

It was not only in the mind of young Purcell that Lottie's circumstances and prospects were the subject of thought. Rollo Ridsdale had not watched and worshipped as the young musician had done. Nor had he, even on his first introduction to her, looked upon Lottie as anything but the possessor of a beautiful voice, of which use might be made, for her benefit no doubt in the long run, but primarily for his own. She was not a divinity; she was not even a woman; she was a valuable stock-in-trade, a most important implement with which to work. Rollo had gone through a very effectual training in this kind. He had run through the little money he possessed so soon, and had learned the use of his wits so early, that the most energetic of tradesmen was not more alive to all the charms of gain than he. The means, perhaps, may be of a different kind, but it does not very much matter in principle whether a man is trained to sharp bargains in bric-à-brac or in cotton bales;

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and it is not essentially a loftier trade to speculate in pictures and china than in shares and stocks. This young aristocrat had kept his eyes very wide open to anything that might come in his way. He was not a director of companies chiefly because his poor little Honourable was not a sufficiently valuable possession to be traded upon, though it had some small value pecuniarily. Lord Courtland himself might indeed have made a few hundreds a year out of his title, but to his second son the name was not worth so much. It secured him some advantages. It gave him the *entrée* to places where things were to be 'picked up,' and it helped him to puff and even to dispose of the wares which he might have in hand. It kept him afloat; it ameliorated poverty; it took away all objections to the sale and barter in which, profitably or unprofitably, he spent so much of his life. Had he gone upon the Stock Exchange, society might have made comments upon the strange necessity; but when Rollo's collection of *objets d'art* was sold, nobody found anything to object to in the transaction, which put a comfortable sum in his pocket, and enabled him to go forth to fresh fields and pastures new; neither was there anything unbecoming his nobility in the enterprise which he had now in hand. Theatres are not gene-

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rally a very flourishing branch of commerce; yet it cannot be denied that those who ruin themselves by them embark in the enterprise with as warm an inclination towards gain as any shopkeeper could boast of. Rollo had thought of Lottie's voice as something quite distinct from any personality. It was a commodity he would like to buy, as he would have liked to buy a picture, or anything rare and beautiful, of which he could be sure that he would get more than his own money for it. In that, as in other things, he would have bought in the cheapest market and sold in the dearest. He would have thought it only right and natural to secure at a low rate the early services of a prima donna. A certain amount of enthusiasm no doubt mingled with the business; just as, had Rollo bought a picture and sold it again, he would have derived a considerable amount of enjoyment from it over and above the profit which went into his pocket; but still he would not have bought the picture, or sought out the future prima donna, on any less urgent and straightforward stimulus than that of gain. Probably, too, the artistic temperament—those characteristics which have to answer for so many things—influenced him more in the pursuit of the talent which was to make his fortune, than any man is ever influenced by

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bales of cotton or railway shares. To hear that 'shirtings are firm' does not thrill the heart as it does to hear the melody of a lovely new voice, which you feel will pay you nobly by transporting the rest of the world as it does yourself. Neither could any amount of coupons fill you with delight like that small scrap of a Bellini by which you hope to *faire fortune*. But, nevertheless, to make his fortune was what Rollo thought of just as much as the man who sells dusters over his counter. If a new kind of duster could be found more efficacious than any previously known, a something that would dust by itself, that would sell by the million, no doubt the shopkeeper, too, would feel a moment's enthusiasm; yet in this he would be quite inferior to the inventor of a new prima donna, who, added to his enjoyment of all that the public gave to hear her, would have the same enjoyment as had the public, without giving anything for it at all.

This had been the simple enthusiasm in Rollo's mind up to his last meeting with Lottie Despard. He had pursued her closely that he might fully understand and know all the qualities of her voice—of the slave he wanted to buy: to know exactly what training it would want, and how much would have to be done to

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it before it could appear before the public, and begin to pay back what he had given for it. And point by point, as he pursued this quest of his, he had noted in her the qualities of beauty, the grace, the expression, the perfection of form and feature, which were so many additional advantages. The rush of colour to her cheek, of spirit or softness to her eyes, had delighted him, as proving in her the power to be an actress as well as a singer. He studied all her looks, interpreted her character to himself, and watched her movements with this end, with a frank indifference to every other, not even thinking what interpretation might be put, what interpretation she might herself put, upon this close and anxious attention. It was not till the evening when, overcome by the feelings which music and excitement had roused in her, Lottie had fled alone to her home, avoiding his escort, that he had suddenly awoke to the consciousness that it was no mere voice, but a young and beautiful woman, with whom he was dealing. The awakening gave him a shock—yet there was pleasure in it, and a flattering consciousness that his prima donna had all along been regarding him in no abstract, but an entirely individual, way. Rollo had been brought up among artificial sentiments. He had been used to hear people talk of the effect of music upon

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their imagination—of the sensations it gave them, and the manner in which they were dominated by it. But he had never seen any one honestly moved like Lottie—abandoning the sphere of her social success, silent in the height of her triumph. When he saw that she could not and would not sing again after that wonderful sacred song, he was himself more vividly impressed than he had ever been by music. It took her voice from her, and her breath—transported her out of herself. How strange it was, yet how real, how natural! just (when you came to think of it) as a pure and elevated mind ought to be touched: though he had never yet seen the fumes of art get so completely into any head before. The reality of Lottie's emotion had awakened Rollo. He was not touched himself by Handel, but he was touched by Lottie. He suddenly saw *her* through the mist of his own preconceived ideas, and through the cloud of conventionalities, those of art and those of society alike. Never in his life before had he so suddenly and distinctly come in contact with a genuine human creature, as God had made her—feeling, moving, living according to the dictates of nature, not as she had been trained to live and feel. This is not to say that he had met with no genuine people in his life. His father and mother were real

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enough, and so was his aunt, Lady Caroline—very real, each in his or her little setting of conveniences and necessities. He knew them, and was quite indifferent to knowing them. But Lottie was altogether detached from the atmosphere in which these good people lived. And he had discovered her suddenly, making acquaintance with her in a moment—finding her out as an astronomer, all alone with the crowds of heaven, finds out a new star. This was how it made so great an impression on him. He had discovered her, standing quite alone among all the women who knew how to express and to control their emotions. She was not trained either to one or the other. The emotion, the enthusiasm in her got the upper hand of her, not she of them. A man who is only used to men and women in the secondary stages of well-sustained emotion is apt to be doubly impressed by the sight of genuine and artless passion, of whatever kind it may be. He went to town thinking not of the prima donna he had found, but of the woman who had suddenly made heaven and earth real to him, as they were to her. He posted up to London—that is, he flew thither in the express train, according to the dictates of his first impulse; but he was so entirely carried away by this second one, that he had almost forgotten his primary purpose altogether. 'Ah!

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that is it,' he said to himself when the prima donna idea once more flashed across his mind. He did not want to lose sight of this, or to be negligent of anything that would help to make his fortune.

Rollo was in the greatest need of having his fortune made. He had nothing except very expensive habits. He was obliged to spend a great deal of money in order to live, and he was obliged to live (or so, at least, he thought); and he had no money at all. Therefore a prima donna or something else was absolutely necessary. Accordingly he wound himself up with great energy, and tried to think no more of that other world which Lottie's touch had plunged him into. In the meantime, in this world of theatres, drawing-rooms, and fashionable coteries, where people are compelled to live, whether they will or not, at an enormous cost in money, and where accordingly money must be hunted wherever scent of it can be found, it was necessary that some one, or something, should make Rollo Ridsdale's fortune. He rushed to his impresario, and roused a faint enthusiasm momentarily in the mind of that man of great undertakings. An English prima donna, a native article, about whom the English would go wild! Yes! But would they go wild over an English prima donna? Would not the

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first step be, ere she was presented to the public at all, to fit her with an Italian name? Signorina Carlotta Desparda—that was what she would have to be called. The impresario shook his head. 'And besides, these native articles never turn out what we are led to expect,' he said. He shook his head; he was sorry, very sorry, to disappoint his *confrère*, but——'

'But—I tell you, you never heard such a voice; the compass of it—the sweetness of it! *simpatica* beyond what words can say—fresh as a lark's—up to anything you can put before her—and with such power of expression. We shall be fools, utter fools, if we neglect such a chance.'

'You are very warm,' said the Manager, rubbing his hands. 'She is pretty, I suppose?'

'No,' said Rollo; 'she is beautiful—and with the carriage of a queen.' (Poor Lottie, in her white frock; how little she knew that there was anything queenlike about her!) 'Come down and see her. That is all I ask of you. Come and hear her——'

'Where may that be?' said the Manager. 'I am leaving town on Monday. Can't we have her up to your rooms, or somewhere at hand?'

'My rooms!' said Rollo, thunderstruck. He knew very little about Lottie, except that she

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was a poor Chevalier's daughter; but he felt that he could have as easily invited one of the Princesses to come and sing in his rooms, that the representatives of the new opera company might judge of her gifts. His face grew so long that his colleague laughed.

'Is she a personage then, Ridsdale? Is she one of your great friends?' he said.

'She is one of my—friends; but she is not a great personage,' said Rollo, gloomily, pulling the little peaked beard which he cultivated, and thinking that it would be as difficult to get his manager invited to the Deanery as it would be to bring Lottie to Jermyn Street. These were difficulties which he had not foreseen. He went over the circumstances hurriedly, trying to think what he could do. Could he venture to go in suddenly to the Chevalier's lodge, as he had done with Lady Caroline's credentials in his pocket, but this time without any credentials, and introduce his companion, and without further ceremony proceed to test the powers of the girl, who he knew was not always compliant nor to be reckoned on? What if she should decline to be tried? What if she had no intention of becoming a singer at all? What if the Manager should condemn her voice as untrained (which it was), or even mistake it altogether, mixing it up with the cracked tones

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of the old piano, and the jingle of the Abbey bells? He had not thought of all these difficulties before. He had not taken time to ask if Lottie would be docile, if Lady Caroline would be complaisant. He pulled his beard, his face growing longer and longer. At last he said,—

'I'll tell you what we can do. We can go to Mrs. O'Shaughnessy——'

'Who on earth is Mrs. O'Shaughnessy?' said the Manager.

'But very likely there is no piano there! You see, this is a difficulty I did not think of. I have heard this lady only in the house of—one of my relations, a very rigid old person, who hates theatres, and thinks opera an invention of the devil.' How Rollo dared slander poor Lady Caroline so, who liked an opera-box as well as any one else, it is impossible to say.

'Well—it doesn't seem to matter much what are the qualities of the voice if we can't hear it,' the Manager said carelessly; and he told his fashionable partner of the singer he had heard of in Milan, who was to distance all the singers then on the operatic stage. 'They are all like that,' he said—'like this private nightingale of yours, Ridsdale—till you hear them; and then they turn out to be very much like the rest. To tell the truth, I am not so very sorry this particular *protégée* of yours has broken down; for I don't

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believe the time has come for an English prima donna, if it ever comes. We've got no confidence in ourselves, so far as art goes—especially musical art. English opera, sir; there's many fine pieces, but you'll never keep it up in England. It might make a hit, perhaps, in Germany, or even France, but not here. Your English prima donna would be considered fit for the music halls. We'd have to dress her up in vowels, and turn her into an Italian. Contemptible? Oh, yes, it's contemptible; but, if we're to make our own money out of it, we mustn't trouble ourselves about what's contemptible. What we've got to do is to please the public. I'm just as glad that this idea of yours has broken down.'

'Broken down! I will never allow it has broken down. It is much easier and pleasanter, of course, to go to Milan than to go to St. Michael's,' said Rollo disdainfully. 'But never mind; if you don't start till Monday, trust me to arrange it somehow. Your new Milanese, of course, will be like all the rest. She will have been brought up to it. She will know how to do one thing, and no more; but this is genius—owing nothing to education and everything to nature. Capable of—I could not say what such a voice and such a woman is not capable of——'

'Bravo, Ridsdale!' said his partner. 'She

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is capable of stirring you up thoroughly, that is clear—and I hope she will be kind to you,' he said, with a big laugh, full of insinuations. The man was vulgar and fat, but a mountain of energy, and Rollo, though disgusted, could not afford to quarrel with him.

'You are entirely out in your notion,' he said, with that air of dignity which is apt to look fictitious in such circumstances. He was not himself easily shocked, nor would this interpretation of his motives have appeared to him at all unlikely in the case of another man; therefore, as was natural, his gravity and look of disgust only confirmed the suspicions of the other, and amused him the more.

'Bravo, my boy; go in and win!' he said, chuckling; 'promise whatever you like, if you find it necessary, and trust to me to back you up.'

To say 'I am unable to understand what you mean,' as Rollo did, with cold displeasure, yet consciousness, did but increase the ecstasy of the fat Manager over the evident fact that his fastidious friend was 'caught at last.'

Rollo went away with a great deal of offended dignity, holding himself stiffly erect, body and soul. He had never been so entirely disgusted, revolted, by the coarse character of the ideas and insinuations, which in themselves

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were not particularly novel, he was aware. It was because everything grew coarse under the touch of such a fellow as this, he said to himself; and it must be allowed that vice, stripped of all sentiment and adornment, was a disgusting spectacle. Rollo had never been a vicious man. He had taken it calmly in others, acknowledging that, if they liked it, he had no right to interfere; but he had not cared for it much himself—he was not a man of passions. A dilettante generally does avoid these coarser snares of humanity; and there had always been a sense of nausea in his mind when he was brought in contact with the vicious. But this nausea had been more physical than spiritual. It was not virtue but temperament which produced it; his own temptations were not in this kind. Nevertheless, he knew that to show any exaggerated feeling on the subject would only expose him to laughter, and he was not courageous enough either to blame warmly in others, or to decry strenuously in himself, the existence of unlawful bonds. What did it matter to anybody if he were virtuous? his neighbours were not on that account to be baulked of their cakes and ale; his disinclination towards sins of the grosser kind was not a thing he was proud of—it was a constitutional peculiarity, like inability to ascend heights or to go to sea without suffer-

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ing. He was not at all sure that it was not a sign of weakness—a thing to be kept out of sight. Accordingly he took his part in the social gossip, which has no warmer interest than this, like everybody else, never pretended to any superiority, and took it for granted that now and then everybody 'went wrong.' He would have been a monster if he had done anything else. Why, even his good aunt Caroline —the best and stupidest of women, to whom, if she had desired it, no opportunity of going wrong had ever presented itself—liked to hear these stories and believed them implicitly, and was convinced that not to go wrong was quite exceptional. Rollo was not the man to emancipate himself from such a complete and universal understanding. He allowed it calmly, and did not pretend either to disapprove or to doubt. Probably he had himself coldly, and as a matter of course, 'gone wrong' too in his day, and certainly he had never given himself out as at all better than his neighbours. Was it only the coarseness of his vulgar associate which made the suggestion so deeply disgusting to him now?

He asked himself this question as, disappointed and annoyed, he left the Manager's ostentatious rooms; and a new sense of unkindness, ungenerosity, unmanliness in having

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exposed a harmless person, a woman whose reputation should be sacred, to such animadversions, suddenly came into his mind, he could not tell how. This view of the matter had never occurred to Rollo before. The women he had heard discussed—and he had heard almost everybody discussed, from the highest to the lowest—had nothing sacred about them to the laughing gossips who discussed all they had done, or might have done, or might be going to do. This, too, was a new idea to him. Who was there whom he had not heard spoken of? ladies a thousand times more important than Miss Despard, the poor Chevalier's daughter at St. Michael's—and nobody had seemed to think there was any harm in it. A man's duty not to let a woman be lightly spoken of? Pooh! What an exaggerated sentimental piece of nonsense! Why should not women take their chance, like any one else? Rollo was like most other persons when in a mental difficulty of this kind. He was not so much discussing with himself as he was the arena of a discussion which unseen arguers were holding within him. While one of these uttered this Pooh! another replied, with a heat and fervour altogether unknown to the clubs, What had Lottie Despard done to subject herself to these suggestions? she who knew nothing about society and its evil thoughts—

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she who had it in her to be uplifted and transported by the music at which these other people, at the best, would clap their hands and applaud. The argument in Rollo's mind went all against himself and his class. He hated not only his manager-partner, whom it was perfectly right and natural to hate, but himself and all the rest of his kind. He was so much disgusted, that he almost made up his mind to let fortune and the English prima donna go together, and to take no further step to make the girl known to those who were so incapable of appreciating her. But when he came that length, Rollo had reached the end of his tether, struck against the uttermost limits of his horizon—and thus was brought back suddenly to the question how he was best to make his prize known ?

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CHAPTER XX.

AN UNCONSCIOUS TRIAL.

It turned out, however, that Rollo could not accomplish the object, which he had aimed at with so much eagerness and hope, in the only legitimate way. He could not get his Manager invited to the Deanery. 'I don't think your aunt would like it; I don't think I could sanction it,' the Dean said, whom he met at his club. Unfortunately the Dean had somewhere encountered the partner by whose aid Rollo expected to make his fortune, and he made it the subject of a little discourse, which Rollo received with impatience. 'I would have nothing to do with him if I were you,' his Reverence said; 'he is not a kind of man to be any credit to his associates. You can't touch pitch without being defiled. I would not have anything to say to him if I were you.'

'Nor should I, uncle, if I were you,' said Rollo, with a rueful smile. He was not aware that this was not original; he was not thinking,

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indeed, of originality, but of the emergency, which he felt was very difficult to deal with.

'Nonsense!' said the Dean; 'don't tell me there are not a great many better occupations going than that of managing a theatre——'

'Opera — opera. Give us our due at least——'

'What difference is there?' said the Dean sternly. 'The opera has ruined just as many men as the theatre. Talk of making your fortune? Did you ever hear of the lessee of a theatre making a fortune? Plenty have been ruined by it, and never one made rich that I ever heard of. Why can't you go into diplomacy or to a public office, or get your Uncle Urban to give you something? You ought not to have anything to do with such a venture as this.'

'My dear uncle,' said Rollo, 'you know well enough how many things I have tried. Uncles are very kind (as in your case), but they can't take all their relations upon their shoulders; and you knew this was what I was doing, and Aunt Caroline knew——'

'Ah! yes; I recollect that was what all the singing was about; but she could not stand that Manager fellow. I could not stand him myself; as for your aunt, you could not expect it. She is very good-natured, but you could not ask her to go so far as that.'

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'He is a man who goes everywhere,' said Rollo; 'he is a man who can behave himself perfectly well wherever he is.'

'Oh, bless you, she would see through him at a glance!' cried the Dean. 'I don't mean to say your aunt is clever, Rollo, but instinct goes a long way. She would see through him. Miss Despard was quite different; she was perfectly *comme il faut.* Girls are wonderful sometimes in that way. Though they may have no advantages, they seem to pick up and look just as good as any one: whereas a man like that—— By the way, I am very sorry for the poor thing. They say her father, a disreputable sort of gay man who never should have got the appointment, is going to marry some low woman. It will be hard upon the girl.'

What an opportunity was this of seizing hold upon her—of overcoming any objection that might arise! Rollo felt himself Lottie's best friend as he heard of this complication. While she might help to make his fortune he could make her independent, above the power of any disreputable father or undesirable home. He could not bear to think that such a girl should be lost in conditions so wretched, and, though the Dean was obdurate, he did not lose hope. But between Thursday and Monday is not a very long time for such negotiations, and

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the Manager was entirely preoccupied by his Milanese, whom another impresario was said to be on the track of, and in whom various connoisseurs were interested. It is impossible to describe the scorn and incredulity with which Rollo himself heard his partner's account of this new singer. He put not the slightest faith in her.

'I know how she will turn out,' he said. 'She will shriek like a peacock; she will have to be taught her own language; she will be coached up for one *rôle* and good for nothing else; and she will smell of garlic enough to kill you.'

'Oh, garlic will never kill me!' said the vulgar partner who gave Rollo so much trouble.

In the meantime he wrote to the Signor to see what could be done, and begged with the utmost urgency that he would arrange something. 'Perhaps the old Irishwoman next door would receive us,' Rollo said, 'even if she has got no piano. Try, my dear Rossinetti, I implore you; try your best.' The Signor was very willing to serve the Dean's nephew; but he was at the moment very much put out by Lottie's reception of young Purcell, as much as if it had been himself that had been refused.

'Who is Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, and how am I to communicate with her?' he cried; and he

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did not throw himself into the work with any zeal. All that he would do at last, moved by Rollo's repeated letters, was to bid him bring his friend down to the service on Sunday afternoon, when he would see Lottie at least, and hear something of her voice. The Manager grinned at this invitation. He was not an enthusiast for Handel, and shrugged his shoulders at sacred music generally as much out of his line; but he ended, having no better engagement on hand, by consenting to go. It was the end of the season; the opera was over, and all its fashionable patrons dispersed; and St. Michael's was something to talk of at least. So the two connoisseurs arrived on a warm afternoon of early August, when the grey pinnacles of the Abbey blazed white in excessive sunshine, and the river showed like glowing metal here and there through the broad valley, too brilliant to give much refreshment to the eyes.

As it happened, it was a chance whether Lottie would attend the service that afternoon at all. She was sorry for poor Purcell, and embarrassed to face the congregation in the Abbey, some of whom at least must know the story. She was certain the Signor knew it, from the glance he had thrown at her; and Mrs. Purcell, she felt sure, would gloom at her from the free seats, and the hero himself look wistful

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and reproachful from the organ-loft. She had very nearly made up her mind not to go. Would it not be better to go out on the slopes, and sit down under a tree, and hear the music softly pealing at a distance, and get a little rest out of her many troubles? Lottie had almost decided upon this, when suddenly, by a caprice, she changed her mind and went. Everything came true as she had divined. Mrs. Purcell fixed her eyes upon her from the moment she sat down in her place, with a gloomy interest which sadly disconcerted Lottie; and so did old Pick, who sat by his fellow servant and chuckled over the conclusion of Mr. John's romance; while once at least Lottie caught the pale dulness of the Signor's face looking disapproval, and at every spare moment the silent appeal of Purcell's eyes looking down from over the railing of the organ-loft. Lottie's heart revolted a little in resistance to all these pitiful and disapproving looks. Why should they insist upon it? If she could not accept young Purcell, what was it to the Signor and old Pick?—though his mother might be forgiven if she felt the disappointment of her boy. The girl shrank a little from all those glances, and gave herself up altogether to her devotions. Was it to her devotions? There was the Captain chanting all the responses within hearing, cheerful and self-con-

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fident, as if the Abbey belonged to him; and there, too, was Law, exchanging glances of a totally different description with the people in the free seats. It was to two fair-haired girls whom Lottie had seen before—who were, indeed, constant in their attendance on the Sunday afternoon—that Law was signalling; and they, on their part, tittered and whispered, and looked at the Captain in his stall, and at another woman in a veil whom Lottie did not make out. This was enough to distract her from the prayers, to which, however, if only to escape from the confusion of her own thoughts, she did her very best to give full attention. But—— She put up her prayer-book in front of her face, and hid herself at least from all the crowd, so full each of his and her own concerns. She was silent during the responses, hearing nothing but her father's voice with its tone of proprietorship, and only allowed herself to sing when the Captain's baritone was necessarily silent. Lottie's voice had become known to the people who sat near her. They looked for her as much as they looked for little Rowley himself, who was the first soprano; but to-day they did not get much from Lottie. Now and then she forgot herself, as in the 'Magnificat,' when she burst forth suddenly unawares, almost taking it out of the hands of the boys; but

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while she was singing Lottie came to herself almost as suddenly, and stopped short, with a quaver and shake in her voice as if the thread of sound had been suddenly broken. Raising her eyes in the midst of the canticle, she had seen Rollo Ridsdale within a few places of her, holding his book before him very decorously, yet looking from her to a large man by his side with unmistakable meaning. The surprise of seeing him whom she believed to be far away, the agitation it gave her to perceive that she herself was still the chief point of interest to him, and the sudden recalling thus of her consciousness, gave her a shock which extinguished her voice altogether. There was a thrill in the music as if a string had broken; and then the hymn went on more feebly, diminished in sweetness and volume, while she stood trembling, holding herself up with an effort. He had come back again, and again his thoughts were full of her, his whole attention turned to her. An instantaneous change took place in Lottie's mind. Instead of the jumble of annoyances and vexations that had been around her —the reproachful looks on one side, the family discordance on the other—her father and Law both jarring with all that Lottie wished and thought right—a flood of celestial calm poured into her soul. She was no longer angry with

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the two fair-haired girls who tittered and whispered through the service, looking up to Law with a hundred telegraphic communications. She was scarcely annoyed when her father's voice pealed forth again in pretentious incorrectness. She did not mind what was happening around her. The sunshine that came in among the pinnacles and fretwork above in a golden mist, lighting up every detail, yet confusing them in a dazzle and glory which common eyes could not bear, made just such an effect on the canopies of the stalls as Rollo's appearance made on Lottie's mind, She was all in a dazzle and mist of sudden calm and happiness which seemed to make everything bright, yet blurred everything in its soft, delicious glow.

'Don't think much of her,' said the Manager, as they came out. The two were going back again at once to town, but Rollo's partner had supposed that at least they would first pay a visit to the Deanery. He was a man who counted duchesses on his roll of acquaintances, but he liked to add a Lady Caroline whenever the opportunity occurred, and deans, too, had their charm. He was offended when he saw that Rollo had no such intention, and at once divined that he was not considered a proper

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person to be introduced to the heads of such a community. This increased his determination not to yield to his partner in this fancy of his, which, indeed, he had always considered presumptuous, finding voices being his own share of the work—a thing much too important to be trusted to an amateur. 'The boy has a sweet little pipe of his own; but as for your *prima donna*, Ridsdale, if you think that sort of thing would pay with us—— No, no! my good fellow; she's a deuced handsome girl, and I wish you joy; I don't wonder that she should have turned your head; but for our new house, not if I know it, my boy. A very nice voice for an amateur, but that sort of thing does not do with the public.'

'You scarcely heard her at all; and the few notes she did sing were so mixed up with those scrubby little boys——'

'Oh! I heard her, and I don't care to hear her again—unless it were in a drawing-room. Why, there's Rossinetti,' said the *impresario*; 'he'll tell you just the same as I do. Do you know what we're down here for, Rossinetti, eh? Deluded by Ridsdale to come and hear some miraculous voice; and it turns out to be only a charming young lady who has bewitched him, as happens to the best of us. Pretty voice for a drawing-room, nice amateur quality; but for

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the profession—— I tell him you must know that as well as I.'

'Come into my place and rest a little; there is no train just yet,' said the Signor. He had left Purcell to play the voluntary, and led the strangers through the nave, which was still crowded with people listening to the great strains of the organ. 'Come out this way,' he said; 'I don't want to be seen. Purcell plays quite as well as I do; but if they see me they will stream off, and hurt his feelings. Poor boy! he has had enough to vex him already.'

These words were on his lips when, coming out by a private door, the three connoisseurs suddenly came upon Lottie, who was walking home with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. The Signor, who was noted for a womanish heat of partisanship and had not forgiven her for the disappointment of his pupil, darted a violent glance at her as he took off his hat. It might have been himself that she had rejected, so full of offence was his look; and this fixed the attention of the big Manager, who took off his hat too, with a smile of secret amusement, and watched the scene, making a private memorandum to the effect that Rossinetti evidently had been hit also; and no wonder! a handsome girl as you could see in a summer day, with a voice that was a very nice voice, a really superior voice for an amateur.

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As for Rollo, he hastened up to Mrs. O'Shaughnessy with fervour, and held out his hand; and how happy and how proud was that kind woman! She curtseyed as she took his hand as if he had been the Prince of Wales, nearly pulling him down, too, ere she recovered herself; and her countenance shone, partly with the heat, partly with the delight.

'And I hope I see *you* well, sir,' she said; 'and glad to see you back in St. Michael's. There's nothing like young people for keeping a place cheerful. Though we don't go into society, me and me Major, yet it's a pleasure to see the likes of you about.'

Rollo had time to turn to Lottie with very eloquent looks while this speech was being addressed to him. 'I am only here for half an hour,' he said; 'I could not resist the temptation of coming for the service.'

'Oh! me dear sir, you wouldn't care so much for the sarvice if ye had as much of it as we have,' said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, going on well pleased. She liked to hear herself talking, and she had likewise a quick perception of the fact that, while she talked, communications of a different kind might go on between 'the young folks.' 'Between ourselves, it's not me that they'll get to stop for their playing,' she said, all the more distinctly that the Signor was

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within hearing. 'I'd go five miles to hear a good band. The music was beautiful in the regiment when O'Shaughnessy was adjutant. And for me own part, Mr. Ridsdale, I'd not give the drums and the fifes for the most elegant music you could play. I don't say that I'm a judge, but I know what I like.'

'Why did you stop so soon?' Rollo said, aside. 'Ah! Miss Despard, was it not cruel? —A good band is an excellent thing, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. I shall try to get my uncle to have the band from the depôt to play once a week, next time I come here.—Thanks all the same for those few notes; I shall live upon them,' he added fervently, 'till I have the chance of hearing you again.'

Lottie made no reply. It was unnecessary with Mrs. O'Shaughnessy there, and talking all the time. And, indeed, what had she to say? The words spread themselves like a balm into every corner of her heart. He would not have gone so far, nor spoken so warmly, if it had not been for the brutal indifference of the big Manager, who stood looking on at a distance, with an air of understanding a great deal more than there was to understand. The malicious knowingness in this man's eyes made Rollo doubly anxious in his civilities; and then he felt it necessary to make up to Lottie for the other's

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blasphemy in respect to her voice, though of this Lottie knew nothing at all.

'I shall not even have time to see my aunt,' he said; 'how fortunate that I have had this opportunity of a word with you! I did not know whether I might take the liberty to call.'

'And welcome, Mr. Ridsdale,' said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. 'Lottie's but a child, so to speak; but I and the Major would be proud to see you. And of an afternoon we're always at home, and, though I say it as shouldn't, as good a cup of tea to offer ye as ye'd get from me Lady Caroline herself. It's ready now, if you'll accept the refreshment, you and—your friend.'

'A thousand thanks, but we must not stay. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, if you see my aunt will you explain how it was I could not come to see her? And be sure you tell her you met me at the Abbey door, or she will not like it. Miss Despard, Augusta is coming home, and I hope to be at the Deanery next month. *Then* I trust you will be more generous, and not stop singing as soon as you see me. What had I done?' he cried in his appealing voice. 'Yes, Rossinetti, I'm coming.—Not Good-bye, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy; only, as the French say, Till we meet again.'

'And I hope that will not be long,' said the good woman, delighted. She swept along the

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Dean's Walk, letting her dress trail after her and holding her head high; she was too much excited to think of holding up her skirts. 'Did ye hear him, Lottie, me honey? "If you see my aunt," says he. Lord bless the man! as if me Lady Caroline was in the way of looking in and, taking a cup of tea! Sure, I'd make her welcome, and more sense than shutting herself up in that old house, and never stirring, no, not to save her life. "If ye see my aunt," says he. Oh, yes! me darlint, I'll see her, shut up in her state, and looking as if—— He'll find the difference when he comes to the Deanery, as he says. Not for you, Lottie, me dear; you're one of themselves, so to speak. But it's not much thanks me Lady Caroline will give him for sending her a message by Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. I thought I'd burst out in his face, "Tell her ye met me by the Abbey door." That's to save me lady's feelings, Lottie. But I'll do his bidding next time I see her; I'll make no bones of it, I'll up and give her my message. Lord! just to see how me lady would take it. See if I don't now. For him, he's a jewel, take me word for it, Lottie; and ye'll be a silly girl, me honey, if you let a gentleman like Mr. Ridsdale slip through your fingers. A real gentleman—ye can see as much by his manners. If I'd been a duchess, Lottie, me dear, what more could he say?'

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Lottie made no reply to this speech, any more than to the words Rollo himself had addressed to her. Her mind was all in a confused maze of happy thoughts and anticipations. His looks, his words, were all turned to the same delicious meaning; and he was coming back to the Deanery, when she was to be 'more generous' to him. No compliment could have been so penetrating as that soft reproach. Lottie had no words to spend upon her old friend, who, for her part, was sufficiently exhilarated to require no answer. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy rang the changes upon this subject all the way to the Lodges. '"When you see my aunt," says he.' The idea that she was in the habit of visiting Lady Caroline familiarly not only amused but flattered her, though it was difficult enough to understand how this latter effect could come about.

Rollo was himself moved more than he could have imagined possible by this encounter. He said nothing as he followed his companions to the Signor's house, and did not even remark what they were saying, so occupied was he in going over again the trivial events of the last few minutes. As he did so, it occurred to him for the first time that Lottie had not so much as spoken to him all the time; not a word had she said, though he had found no deficiency in

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her. It was evident, then, that there might be a meeting which should fill a man's mind with much pleasant excitement and commotion, and leave on his thoughts a very delightful impression, without one word said by the lady. This idea amused him in the pleasant agitation of his being to which the encounter at the church door had given rise. He forgot what he had come for, and the rudeness of his partner, and the refusal of that personage to think at all of Lottie. He did not want any further discussion of this question; he had forgotten, even, that it could require to be discussed. Somehow all at once, yet completely, Lottie had changed character to him; he did not want to talk her over with anyone, and he forgot altogether the subject upon which the conversation must necessarily turn when he followed the Signor and his big companion through the groups of people who began to emerge from the Abbey. There were a great many who stared at Rollo, knowing who he was, but none who roused him from his preoccupation. Fortunately the Dean had a cold and was not visible, and Lady Caroline did not profess to go to church in the afternoon—'It was too soon after lunch, and there were so many people, and one never felt that one had the Abbey to one's self,' her ladyship said.

The Manager went off to Italy the next day,

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after his Milanese, without being at all restrained by Rollo, who was glad to get rid of him, and to have no more said about the English *prima donna.* He did not quite like it even, so perverse was he, when the Signor, sitting out upon his terrace, defended her against the *impresario's* hasty verdict: 'She has a beautiful voice, so far as that goes,' the Signor said, with the gravity of a judge; 'you are mistaken if you do not admire her voice; we have had occasion to hear it, and we know what it is, so far as that goes.'

'You dog!' said the jovial Manager, with a large fat laugh. 'I see something else if I don't see that, Ah, Rossinetti! hit too?'

'Do you happen to know what he means?' said the Signor with profound gravity, turning his fine eyes upon Ridsdale. 'Ah! it is a pleasantry, I suppose. I have not the same appreciation of humour that I might have had, had I been born an Englishman,' he said, with a seriousness that was portentous, without relaxing a muscle.

Rollo, who was not aware of the vehement interest with which the Signor espoused Purcell's cause, felt the Manager's suspicions echo through his own mind. He knew how entirely disinclined he felt to enter upon this question. Was his companion right, and had the Signor

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been hit too? It seemed to Rollo that the wonder was how anyone could avoid that catastrophe. The Manager made very merry, as they went back to town, upon Lottie's voice and the character of the admiration which it had excited; but all this Rollo received with as much solemnity of aspect as characterised the Signor.

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CHAPTER XXI.

SEARCHINGS OF HEART.

It was not to be supposed that the visit of Rollo and his companion should pass unnoticed in so small a community as that of St. Michael's, where everybody knew him, and in which he had all the importance naturally belonging to a member, so to speak, of the reigning family. Everybody noticed his appearance in the Abbey, and it soon became a matter of general talk that he was not at the Deanery, but had come down from town expressly for the service, returning by as early a train afterwards as the Sunday regulations of the railway allowed. What did he come for? Not to see his relations, which would have been a comprehensible reason for so brief a visit. He had been seen talking to somebody at the north door, and he had been seen following the Signor, in company with a large and brilliant person who wore more rings and studs and *breloques* than had ever been seen at St. Michael's. Finally, this remarkable stranger, who was evidently a friend

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of the Signor as well as of Rollo, had been visible on the little green terrace outside Rossinetti's sitting-room, smoking cigarettes and drinking claret-cup, and tilting up his chair upon two legs in a manner which suggested a tea-garden, critics said, more than a studious nook sheltered among the buttresses of the Abbey. Public opinion was instinctively unfavourable to Rollo's companion; but what was the young prince, Lady Caroline's nephew, doing there? Then the question arose, who was it to whom Rollo had been talking at the north door? All the Canons and their wives, and the ladies in the Lodges, and even the townspeople, when the story reached them, cried out 'Impossible!' when they were told that it was Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. But that lady had no intention of concealing the honour done her. She published it, so to speak, on the housetops. She neglected no occasion of making her friends acquainted with all the particulars of the interview. 'And who should it have been but me?' she said. 'Is there e'er another one at St. Michael's that knows as much of his family? Who was it but an uncle of his, or maybe it might be a cousin, that was in the regiment with us, and O'Shaughnessy's greatest friend? Many's the good turn the Major's done him; and, say the worst you can o' the Ridsdales, it's

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not ungrateful they are. It's women that are little in their ways. What does a real gentleman care for our little quarrels and the visiting list at the Deanery? "When ye see me aunt," says he, "Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, ye'll tell her——" Sure he took it for certain that me Lady Caroline was a good neighbour, and would step in of an afternoon for her bit of talk and her cup o' tea. "You'll tell her," says he, "that I hadn't time to go and see her." And, please God, I will do it when I've got the chance. If her ladyship forgets her manners, it shall ne'er be said that O'Shaughnessy's wife was wanting in good breeding to a family the Major had such close connections with.'

'But do you really know—Mr. Ridsdale's family?' said Lottie, after one of these brilliant addresses, somewhat bewildered by her recollection of what had passed. 'And, sure, didn't you hear me say so? Is it doubting me word you are?' said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, with a twinkle in her eye. Lottie was bewildered—but it did not matter much. At this moment nothing seemed to matter very much. She had been dull, and she had been troubled by many things before the wonderful moment in which she had discovered Rollo close to her in the Abbey—much troubled, foreseeing with dismay the closing in around her of a network of new

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associations in which there could be nothing but pain and shame, and dull with a heavy depression of dulness which no ray of light in the present, no expectation in the future, seemed to brighten. Purcell's hand held out to her, tenderly, yet half in pity, had been the only personal encouragement she had; and that had humbled her to the dust, even though she struggled with herself to do him justice. Her heart had been as heavy as lead. There had seemed to her nothing that was hopeful, nothing that was happy before her. Now all the heaviness had flown away. Why? Why, for no reason at all, because this young man, whom she supposed (without any warrant for the foolish idea) to love her, had come back for an hour or two; because he was coming back on a visit. The visit was not to her, nor had she probable share in the enjoyments to be provided for Lady Caroline's nephew; and Lottie did not love him to make his very presence a delight to her. She did not love him—yet. This was the unexpressed feeling in her mind; but when a girl has got so far as this it may be supposed that the visit of the lover whom she does not love—yet, must fill her with a thousand delightful tremors. How could she doubt his sentiments? What was it that brought him back and back again to St.

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Michael's? And to be led along that flowery way to the bower of bliss at the end of it, to be persuaded into love by all the flatteries and worship of a lover so delicately impassioned—could a girl's imagination conceive anything more exquisite? No, she was not in love—yet—— But there was no reason why she should not be, except the soft maidenly reluctance, the shy retreat before one who kept advancing, the instinct of coy resistance to an inevitable delight.

Into this delicate world of happiness, in which there was nothing real, but all imagination, Lottie was delivered over that bright Sunday. She had no defence against it, and she did not wish to have any. She gave herself up to the dream. After that interval of heaviness, of darkness, when there was no pleasant delusion to support her, and life, with all its difficulties and dangers, became so real, confronting her at every point, what an escape it was for Lottie to find herself again under the dreamy skies of that fool's paradise! It was the Garden of Eden to her. She thought it was the true world, and the other the false one. The vague terror and disgust with which her father's new plans filled her mind floated away like a mist; and, as for Law, what so easy as to carry him with her into the better world where

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she was going? Her mind in a moment was lightened of its load. She had left home heavily; she went back scarcely able to keep from singing in the excess of her light-heartedness, more lifted above earth than if any positive good had come to her. So long as the good is coming, and exists in the imagination only, how much more entrancing is it than anything real that ever can be ours!

The same event, however, which had so much effect upon Lottie acted upon her family too in a manner for which she was far from being prepared. Captain Despard came in as much elated visibly as she was in her heart. There had been but little intercourse among them since the evening when the Captain had made those inquiries about Rollo, which Lottie resented so deeply. The storm had blown over, and she had nominally forgiven Law for going over to the enemy's side; but Lottie's heart had been shut even against her brother since that night. He had forsaken her, and she had not been able to pass over his desertion of her cause. However, her heart had softened with her happiness, and she made his tea for him now more genially than she had done for weeks before. They seated themselves round the table with, perhaps, less constraint than usual—a result due to the smiling aspect of the

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Captain as well as to the softened sentiment in Lottie's heart. Once upon a time a family tea was a favourite feature in English literature, from Cowper down to Dickens, not to speak of the more exclusively domestic fiction of which it is the chosen banquet. A great deal has been said of this nondescript (and indigestible) meal. But perhaps there must be a drawing of the curtains, a wheeling-in of the sofa, a suggestion of warmth and comfort in contradistinction to storms and chills outside, as in the Opium-eater's picture of his cottage, to carry out the ideal—circumstances altogether wanting to the tea of the Despards, which was *eaten (passez-moi le mot*, for is it not the bread-and-butter that makes the meal?) in the warmest hour of an August afternoon. The window, indeed, was open, and the Dean's Walk, by which the townspeople were coming and going in considerable numbers, as they always did on Sunday, was visible, with its gay groups, and the prospect outside was more agreeable than the meal within. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, next door, had loosed her cap-strings, and fanned herself at intervals as she sipped her tea. 'It's hot, but sure it cools you after,' she was saying to her Major. The Despards, however, were not fat, and did not show the heat like their neighbours. Law sat at the table and pegged

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away resolutely at his bread-and-butter, having nothing to take his mind off his food, and no very exciting prospect of supper to sustain him. But the Captain took his tea daintily, as one who had heard of a roast fowl and sausages to be ready by nine o'clock, and was, therefore, more or less indifferent to the bread-and-butter. He patted Lottie on the shoulder as she gave him his tea.

'My child,' he said, 'I was wrong the other day. It is not every man that would own it so frankly; but I have always been a candid man, though it has damaged me often. When I am in the wrong I am bound to confess it. Take my hand, Lottie, my love. I made a mistake.'

Lottie looked at him surprised. He had taken her hand and held it, shaking it, half-playfully, in his own.

'My love,' he said, 'you are not so candid as your poor father. You will get on all the better in the world. I withdraw everything I said, Lottie. All is going well; all is for the best. I make no doubt you can manage your own affairs a great deal better than I.'

'What is it you mean, papa?'

'We will say no more, my child. I give you free command over yourself. That was a fine anthem this afternoon, and I have no doubt those were well repaid who came from a dis-

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tance to hear it. Don't you think so, Lottie? Many people come from a great distance to hear the service in the Abbey, and no doubt the Signor made it known that there was to be such a good anthem to-day.'

Lottie did not make any reply. She looked at him with mingled wonder and impatience. What did he mean? It had not occurred to her to connect Rollo with the anthem, but she perceived by the look on her father's face that something which would be displeasing to her was in his mind.

'What's the row?' said Law. 'Who was there? I thought it was always the same old lot.'

'And so it is generally the same old lot. *We* don't vary; but when pretty girls like Lottie say their prayers regularly heaven sends somebody to hear them. Oh, yes; there is always somebody sent to hear them. But you are quite right to allow nothing to be said about it, my child,' said the Captain. 'Not a word, on the honour of a gentleman. Your feelings shall be respected. But it may be a comfort to you, my love, to feel that whatever happens your father is behind you, Lottie—knows and approves. My dear, I say no more.'

'By Jove! What is it?' cried Law.

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'It is nothing to you,' said his father. 'But look here, Law. See that you don't go out all over the place and leave your sister by herself, without anyone to take care of her. My engagements I can't always give up, but don't let me hear that there's nobody to walk across the road with Lottie when she's asked out.'

'Oh, that's it, is it?' said Law. 'I thought they'd had enough of you at the Deanery, Lottie. That's going to begin again, then, I suppose?'

'I am not invited to the Deanery,' said Lottie, with as much state and solemnity as she could summon up, though she trembled; 'neither is it going to begin again. There is no occasion for troubling Law or you either. I always have taken care of myself hitherto, and I suppose I shall do it till the end.'

'You need not get on your high horse, my child,' said Captain Despard, blandly. 'Don't suppose that I will interfere; but it will be a consolation to you to remember that your father is watching over you, and that his heart goes with you,' he added, with an unctuous roll in his voice. He laid his hand for a moment on her head, and said, 'Bless you, my love,' before he turned away. The Captain's emotion was great; it almost brought the tears to his manly eyes.

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'What *is* the row?' said Law, when his father had gone. Law's attention had been fully occupied during the service with his own affairs, and he did not know of the reappearance of Rollo. 'One would think he was going to cry over you, Lottie. What have you done? Engagements! he has always got some engagement or other. I never knew a fellow with such a lot of friends—I shouldn't wonder if he was going to sup somewhere to-night. I wonder what they can see in him,' said Law, with a sigh.

'Law, are you going out too?'

'Oh, I suppose so; there is nothing to do in the house. What do you suppose a fellow can do? Reading is slow work; and, besides, it's Sunday, and it's wrong to work on Sunday. I shall go out and look round a bit, and see if I can see anyone I know.'

'Do you ever think, I wonder,' said Lottie —'papa and you—that if it is so dull for you in the house, it must sometimes be a little dull for me?'

She was not in the habit of making such appeals, but to-night there was courage and a sense of emancipation in her which made her strong.

'You? Oh, well, I don't know—you are a girl,' said Law, 'and girls are used to it. I

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don't know what you would do if you wanted to have a little fun, eh? I dare say you don't know yourself. Yes, I shouldn't wonder if it was dull; but what can anyone do? It's nature, I suppose,' said Law. 'There isn't any fun for girls, as there is for us. Well, is there? How should I know?'

But there was 'fun' for Emma and her sisters of the workroom, Law reminded himself with a compunction. 'I'll tell you what, Lottie,' he said hastily; 'you must just do as other girls do. You must get some one to walk with you, and talk, and all that, you know. There's nothing else to be done; and you might have plenty. There's that singing fellow, that young Purcell; they say he's in love with you. Well, he's better than nobody; and you could give him the sack as soon as you saw somebody you liked better. I thought at one time that Ridsdale——'

'I think, Law,' said Lottie, 'you had better go out for your walk.'

He laughed. He was half-pleased to have roused and vexed her, yet half-sorry too. Poor Lottie! Now that she was abandoned by her grand admirer and all her fine friends, it must be dull for her, staying in the house by herself; but then what could he do, or anyone? It was nature. Nature, perhaps, might be to blame

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for not providing 'fun' for girls, but it was not for Law to set nature right. When he had got his hat, however, and brushed his hair before going out, he came back and looked at Lottie with a compunction. He could not give up meeting Emma in order to take his sister for a walk, though, indeed, this idea actually did glance across his mind as a rueful possibility. No, he could not go; he had promised Emma to meet her in the woods, and he must keep his word. But he was very sorry for Lottie. What a pity she had not some one of her own —Purcell, if nobody better! and then, when the right one came, she might throw him off. But Law did not dare to repeat his advice to this effect. He went and looked at her remorsefully. Lottie had seated herself upstairs in the little drawing-room; she was leaning her elbow on the ledge of the little deep window, and her head upon her hand. The attitude was pensive; and Law could not help thinking that to be a girl, and sit there all alone looking out of a window instead of roaming about as he did, would be something very terrible. The contrast chilled him and made him momentarily ashamed of himself. But then he reflected that there were a great many people passing up and down, and that he had often heard people say it was amusing to sit at a window. Very likely

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Lottie thought so; probably, on the whole, she liked that better than going out. This must be the case, he persuaded himself, or else she would have been sure to manage to get some companion; therefore he said nothing to her, but went downstairs very quietly and let himself out softly, not making any noise with the door. Law had a very pleasant walk with Emma under the trees, and enjoyed himself, but occasionally there would pass a shadow over him as he thought of Lottie sitting at the window in the little still house all alone.

But indeed, for that evening at least, Lottie was not much to be pitied. She had her dreams to fall back upon. She had what is absolutely necessary to happiness—not only something to look back to, but something to look forward to. That is the true secret of bliss—something that is coming. With that to support us can we not bear anything? After a while, no doubt, Lottie felt, as she had often felt before, that it was dull. There was not a sound in the little house; everybody was out except herself; and it was Sunday, and she could not get her needlework to occupy her hands and help on her thoughts. As the brightness waned slowly away, and the softness of the evening lights and then the dimness of the approaching dark stole on, Lottie had a great longing to get out of doors; but she

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could not go and leave the house, for even the maid was out, having her Sunday walk with her young man. It was astonishing how many girls had gone wandering past the window, each with her young man. Not much wonder, perhaps, that Law had suggested this sole way of a little 'fun' for a girl. Poor Law! he did not know any better; he did not mean any harm. She laughed now at the suggestion which had made her angry at the time, for to-night Lottie could afford to laugh. But when she heard the maid-servant come in, Lottie, wearied with her long vigil, and longing for a breath of cool air after the confinement of the house, agreed with herself that there would be no harm in taking one little turn upon the slopes. The townspeople had mostly gone. Now and then a couple of the old Chevaliers would come strolling homeward, having taken a longer walk in the calm of the Sunday evening than their usual turn on the Slopes. Captain Temple and his wife had gone by arm-in-arm. Perhaps they had been down to the evening service in the town, perhaps only out for a walk, like everybody else. Gradually the strangers were disappearing; the people that belonged to the Precincts were now almost the only people about, and there was no harm in taking a little walk alone; but it was not a thing Lottie cared much to do. With a

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legitimate errand she would go anywhere; but for a walk! The girl was shy, and full of all those natural conventional reluctances which cannot be got out of women; but she could not stay in any longer. She went out with a little blue shawl folded like a scarf—as was the fashion of the time—over her shoulders, and flitted quickly along the Dean's Walk to the slopes. All was sweet in the soft darkness and in the evening dews, the grass moist, the trees or the sky sometimes distilling a palpable dew-drop, the air coming softly over all those miles of country to touch with the tenderest salutation Lottie's cheek. She looked out upon the little town nestling at the foot of the hill with all its twinkling lights, and upon the stars that shone over the long glimmer of the river, which showed here and there, through all the valley, pale openings of light in the dark country. How sweet and still it was! The openness of the horizon, the distance, was the thing that did Lottie good. She cast her eyes to the very farthest limit of the world that lay within her sight and drew a long breath. Perhaps it was this that caught the attention of some one who was passing. Lottie had seated herself in a corner under a tree, and she did not see this wayfarer, who was behind her; and the reader knows that she did not sigh for sorrow, but only

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to relieve a bosom which was very full of fanciful anticipations, hopes, and dreams. It was not likely, however, that Mr. Ashford would know that. He too was taking his evening walk; and when he heard the sigh in which so many tender and delicious fancies exhaled into the air, he thought—who could wonder?—that it was somebody in trouble; and, drawing a little nearer to see if he could help, as was the nature of the man, found to his great surprise—as she, too, startled, turned round her face upon him—that it was Lottie Despard who was occupying the seat which was his favourite seat also. They both said 'I beg your pardon' simultaneously, though it would be hard to tell why.

'I think I have seen you here before,' he said. 'You like this time of the evening, Miss Despard, like myself—and this view?'

'Yes,' said Lottie; 'but I have been sitting indoors all the afternoon, and got tired of it at last. I did not like to come out all by myself; but I thought no one would see me now.'

'Surely you may come here in all safety by yourself.' The Minor Canon had too much good breeding to suggest any need of a companion or any pity for the girl left alone. Then he said suddenly, 'This is an admirable chance for me. The first time we met, Miss Despard,

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you mentioned something about which you wished to consult me——'

'Ah!' cried Lottie, coming back out of her dreams. Yes, she had wanted to consult him, and the opportunity must not be neglected. 'It was about Law, Mr. Ashford. Law—his name is Lawrence, you know, my brother; he is a great boy, almost a man—more than eighteen. But I am afraid he is very backward. I want him so very much to stand his examination. It seems that nothing—nothing can be done without that now.'

'His examination—for what?'

'Oh, Mr. Ashford,' said Lottie, 'for anything! I don't mind what it is. I thought, perhaps, if you would take him it would make him see the good of working. We are—poor; I need not make any fuss about saying that; here we are all poor; and if I could but see Law in an office earning his living, I think,' cried Lottie, with the solemnity of a martyr, 'I think I should not care what happened. That was all. I wanted him to come to you, that you might tell us what he would be fit for.'

'He would make a good soldier,' said Mr. Ashford, smiling; 'though there is an examination for that too.'

'There are examinations for everything, I think,' said Lottie, shaking her head mourn-

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fully; 'that is the dreadful thing; and you see, Mr. Ashford, we are poor. He has not a penny; he must work for his living; and how is he to get started? That is what I am always saying. But what is the use of speaking? You know what boys are. Perhaps if I had been able to insist upon it years ago—but then I was very young too. I had no sense, any more than Law.'

The Minor Canon was greatly touched. The evening dew got into his eyes—he stood by her in the soft summer darkness, wondering. He was a great deal older than Lottie—old enough to be her father, he said to himself; but he had no one to give him this keen, impatient anxiety, this insight into what boys are. 'Was there no one but you to insist upon it?' he said, in spite of himself.

'Well,' said Lottie meditatively, 'do gentlemen—generally—take much trouble about what boys are doing? I suppose they have got other things to think of.'

'You have not much opinion of men, Miss Despard,' said the Minor Canon, with a half-laugh.

'Oh, indeed I have!' cried Lottie. 'Why do you say that? I was not thinking about men—but only—— And then boys themselves, Mr. Ashford; you know what they are. Oh!

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I think sometimes if I could put some of me into him. But you can't do that. You may talk, and you may coax, and you may scold, and try every way—but what does it matter? If a boy won't do anything, what is to be done with him? That is why I wanted so much, so very much, to bring him to you.'

'Miss Despard,' said the Minor Canon, 'you may trust me that if there is anything I can do for him I will do it. As it happens, I am precisely in want of some one to—to do the same work as another pupil I have. That would be no additional trouble to me, and would not cost anything. Don't you see? Let him come to me to-morrow and begin.'

'Oh, Mr. Ashford,' said Lottie, 'I knew by your face you were kind—but how very, very good you are! But then,' she added sorrowfully, 'most likely he could not do the same work as your other pupil. I am afraid he is very backward. If I were to tell you what he is doing you might know. He is reading Virgil—a book about as big as himself,' she said, with a little laugh, that was very near crying. 'Won't you sit down here?'

'Virgil is precisely the book my other pupil is doing,' said Mr. Ashford, laughing too, very tenderly, at her small joke, poor child! while she made room for him anxiously on the bench.

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There they sat together for a minute in silence —all alone, as it might be, in the world, nothing but darkness round them, faint streaks of light upon the horizon, distant twinkles of stars above and homely lamps below. The man's heart softened strangely within him over this creature, who, for all the pleasure she had, came out here, and apologised to him for coming alone. She who, neglected by everybody, had it in her to push forward the big lout of a brother into worthy life, putting all her delicate strength to that labour of Hercules—he felt himself getting quite foolish, moved beyond all his experiences of emotion, as, at her eager invitation, he sat down there by her side.

And as he did so other voices and steps became audible among the trees of somebody coming that way. Lottie had turned to him, and was about to say something, when the sound of the approaching voices reached them. He could see her start—then draw herself erect, close into the corner of the bench. The voices were loudly pitched, and attempted no concealment.

'La, Captain, how dark it is! Let's go home; mother will be looking for us,' said one.

'My dear Polly,' said the other—and though Mr. Ashford did not know Captain Despard, he divined the whole story in a moment as the

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pair brushed past arm-in-arm—'my dear Polly, your home will be very close at hand next time I bring you here.'

Lottie said nothing—her heart jumped up into her throat, beating so violently that she could not speak. And to the Minor Canon the whole family story seemed to roll out like the veiled landscape before him as he looked compassionately at the girl sitting speechless by his side, while her father and his companion, all unconscious in the darkness, brushed against her, sitting there unseen under the shadowy trees.

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CHAPTER XXII.

A CHANCE FOR LAW.

MR. ASHFORD took Lottie home that evening, walking with her to her own door. There was not much said; for, notwithstanding the armour of personal hope and happiness which she had put on, the shock of this personal encounter with her father and the woman who was to be her father's wife made the girl tremble with secret excitement, in spite of herself. The woman: it was this, the sight and almost touch of this new, unknown, uncomprehended being brushing past her in the darkness which overwhelmed Lottie. That first contact made the girl sick and faint. She could not talk to Mr. Ashford any more—her voice seemed to die out of her throat, where her heart was fluttering. She could not think even what she had been saying. It was all confused, driven aside into a corner, by that sudden apparition. Mr. Ashford, on his side, said little more than Lottie. It seemed to him that he had a sudden insight into all that was happening. He had heard, though without

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paying much attention, the common gossip about Captain Despard, who was not considered by anybody within the Precincts as a creditable inmate; but this curious little scene, of which he had been a witness, had placed him at once in the midst of the little drama. He seemed to himself to have shared in the shock Lottie had received. He walked softly by her side, saying little, full of compassion, but too sympathetic even to express his sympathy. He would not hurt her by seeming to be sorry for her. When they parted he held her hand for a moment with a kind, serious grasp, as if he had been her father, and said:

'You will send him to me to-morrow, Miss Despard? I shall expect him to-morrow.'

'Oh—Law!' she said, with a little start and recovery. Poor Law had gone out of her mind.

'Poor child!' he said, as he turned towards his house; but before he had crossed the road he was met by Captain Temple coming the other way.

'Was that Miss Despard?' asked the old man. 'Is it she you were saying good-night to? My wife told me she had gone towards the Slopes, and I was on my way to bring her home.'

'I met her there, and I have just brought

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her home,' said the Minor Canon. He could scarcely make out in the dark who his questioner was.

'That is all right—that is all right,' said the old Chevalier. 'She is left too much alone, and she should have some one to take care of her. I feel much obliged to you, Mr. Ashford, for I take a great interest in the young lady.'

'It is—Captain Temple?' said Mr. Ashford, peering at the old man with contracted, short-sighted eyes. 'I beg your pardon. Yes, Miss Despard is quite safe; she has been talking to me about her brother. What kind of boy is he? I only know he is a big fellow, and not very fond of his work.'

Captain Temple shook his head. 'What can you expect? It is not the boy's fault; but she is the one I take an interest in. You know I had once a girl of my own—just such another, Mr. Ashford—just such another. I always think of her when I see this pretty creature. Poor things—how should they know the evil that is in the world? They think everybody as good as themselves, and when they find out the difference it breaks their sweet hearts. I can't look at a young girl like that, not knowing what her next step is to bring her, without tears in my eyes.'

The Minor Canon did not make any reply;

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his heart was touched, but not as Captain Temple's was touched. He looked back at the dim little house, where as yet there were no lights—not thinking of Lottie as an all-believing and innocent victim, but rather as a young Britomart, a helmeted and armed maiden, standing desperate in defence of her little stronghold against powers of evil which she was noways ignorant of. It did not occur to him that these images might be conjoined, and both be true.

'I take a great interest in her,' said old Captain Temple again, 'and so does my wife, Mr. Ashford. My wife cannot talk of our loss as I do; but, though she says little, I can see that she keeps her eye upon Lottie. Poor child! She has no mother, and, for that matter, you might say no father either. She has a claim upon all good people. She may be thrown in your way sometimes, when none of us can be of any use to her. It would make me happy if you would say that you would keep an eye upon her too, and stand by her when she wants a friend.'

'You may be sure I will do that—if ever it should be in my power.'

'Thanks. You will excuse me speaking to you? Most people allow the right we have in our trouble to think of another like our own. I

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am quite happy to think you will be one of her knights too, Mr. Ashford. So will my wife. Ah, we owe a great deal—a great deal—to innocence. Good night, and my best thanks.'

Mr. Ashford could not smile at the kind old Chevalier and his monomania. He went home very seriously to his dark little house, where no one had lighted his lamp. He was not so well served as the Signor. There was a faint light on the stairs, but none in his dark wainscoted library, where the three small deep windows were more than ever like three luminous yet dim pictures hanging upon a gloomy wall. When he had lighted his reading-lamp the pictures were put out, and the glimmering dim interior, with its dark reflections and the touches of gilding and faded brown of his books, came into prominence. He half smiled to think of himself as one of Lottie Despard's knights; but outside of this calm and still place what a glimpse had been afforded him of the tumults and miseries of the common world, within yet outside all the calm precincts of ordered and regular life! The girl with whom he had been talking stood *aux prises* with all these forces, while he, so much more able for that battle, was calm and sheltered. To see her struggling against the impassibility of a nature less noble than her own—to think of her all forlorn and

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solitary, piteous in her youth and helplessness, on the verge of so many miseries, wrung his heart with pity, with tenderness, with—— Was it something of envy too? All the powers of life were surging about Lottie, contending in her and around her; forces vulgar yet powerful, calling forth in that bit of a girl, in that slim creature, made, the man thought, for all the sweetness and protections of life, all its heroic qualities instead—while for such as he, thirty-five, and a man, fate held nothing but quiet, and mastery of all circumstances, Handel and the Abbey! What a travesty and interchange of all that was fit and natural!—for him ought to be the struggle, for her the peace; but Providence had not ordained it so.

How often is this so! times without number; the weak have to struggle while the strong look on. Women and children labour while full-grown men rest; the sick and the feeble have all the powers of darkness to encounter, while the athlete yawns his unoccupied force away. So this strange paradox of a world runs on. The Minor Canon, who was of very gentle mould, with a heart open as day to melting charities, sat and thought of it with a giddiness and vertigo of the heart. He could not change it. He could not take up Lottie's trouble and give her his calm. One cannot stand in another's place

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—not you in mine, nor I in yours—though you may be a hundred times more capable of my work than I. This was what Ernest Ashford thought sitting among his peaceful books, and following Lottie Despard in imagination into the little lodge which was her battlefield. Sympathy gave him the strongest mental perception of all that took place there. The only thing he had no clue to was the sweet and secret flood of consolation which subdued her sense of all her troubles—which already had drowned the dread of the future, and floated over with brightness the difficulties of the present in Lottie's heart.

Next morning Law arrived at the house of the Minor Canon, considerably to his own surprise, with his big Virgil under his arm. 'I don't know whether you meant it, or if she understood you,' he said, shy and uncomfortable, looking down at his shoes, and presenting the top of his head rather than his face to Mr. Ashford's regard, 'but my sister said——'

'Yes; I meant it fully. Sit down and tell me what you have been doing, and whereabouts you are in your work. I have a pupil coming presently with whom probably you might read——'

'Well, you must know that I haven't been what you might call working very hard, you know,' said Law, still butting at his future

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instructor with the top of his head. He sat down as Mr. Ashford directed him, but he did not give up the earnest contemplation of his boots. 'It isn't so easy to get into the way of it when you're working alone. I left school a long time ago—and I don't know that it was much of a school—and latterly I was a little bit irregular—and so, you know——'

'I see,' said the Minor Canon; 'however, it is not too late to do better. What is that big book under your arm—Virgil? Very well. Construe a passage for me, and let me see how you get on.'

'Shall I do a bit I know, or a bit I don't know?' said Law, raising his head this time with a doubtful gleam, half of merriment. 'Of course, I want to put my best foot foremost—but I don't want to take you in all the same.'

'I must trust you entirely on that point—or give me the book, I will choose, and chance shall decide.'

'Oh, hang it!' said Law under his breath. He would have been honest and avowed what he knew; but this kind of Sortes did not please him. The perspiration came out on his forehead. Of course it was a very hard bit, or what Law thought a very hard bit, that turned up—and the way in which he struggled through it, growing hotter and hotter, redder and redder, was a sight to see.

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'That will do,' Mr. Ashford said, compassionate, yet horrified. 'That will do.' And he took the book out of his would-be pupil's hands with a sigh, and smoothed down the page, which Law had ruffled in his vain efforts, with a regretful touch, as though asking pardon of Virgil. 'Suppose we have a little talk on this subject?' he said. 'No doubt you have made up your mind what you would like to do?'

'Not I,' said Law. 'It will have to be some office or other—that's the only way in which a fellow who has no money seems to be able to make a living. A very poor living, so far as I hear—but still it is something, I suppose. That is not what I would like by nature. I'd like to go out to Australia or New Zealand. I hate the notion of being cooped up to a desk. But I suppose that is how it will have to be.'

'Because of your sister? You would not abandon her? It does you a great deal of credit,' said the Minor Canon, with warmth.

'Well, because of her in one way,' said Law; 'because she is always so strong against it, and because I have no money for a start. You don't suppose that I would mind otherwise? No; Lottie is all very well, but I don't see why a man should give into her in everything. She will have to think for herself in future, and so

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shall I. So, if you will tell me what you think I could do, Mr. Ashford; I should say you don't think I can do anything after that try,' said Law, with an upward glance of investigation, half-wistful, half-ashamed.

'Have you read English literature much? That tells nowadays,' said the Minor Canon. 'If you were to give any weight to my opinion, I would tell you to get the papers for the army examination, and try for that.'

'Ah! that's what I should like,' cried Law; 'but it's impossible. Fellows can't live on their pay. Even Lottie would like me to go into the army. But it's not to be done. You can't live on your pay. English! Oh, I've read a deal of stories—*Harry Lorrequer* and *Soapy Sponge*, and that sort of—rot.'

'I am afraid that will not do much good,' said the Minor Canon, shaking his head. 'And, indeed, I fear, if you are going to be successful, you must set to work in a more serious way. Perhaps you are good at figures—mathematics? —no!—science, perhaps—natural history——'

'If you mean the Zoological Gardens, I like that,' said Law, beginning to see the fun of this examination; 'and I should be very fond of horses, if I had the chance. But that has nothing to say to an office. Figures, ha? yes, I know. But I always hated counting. I see

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you think there is nothing to be made of me. That is what I think myself. I have often told her so. I shall have to 'list, as I have told her.' Law looked at his companion with a little curiosity as he said this, hoping to call forth an alarmed protestation.

But Mr. Ashford was not horrified. He was about to say, 'It is the very best thing you could do,' but stopped, on consideration, for Lottie's sake.

'You are a man to look at,' he said, 'though you are young. Has it never occurred to you till now to think what you would like to be? You did not think you could go on for ever stumbling over ten lines of Virgil? I beg your pardon, I don't mean to be rude; but the most of us have to live by something, and a young man like you ought to have a notion what he is going to be about. You thought of the Civil Service?'

'I suppose Lottie did,' said Law, getting up and seizing his book. 'It is all her doing, from first to last; it is she that has always been pushing and pushing. Yes; what's the use of trying Virgil? I always felt it was all bosh. I don't know it, and what's more, I don't want to know it. I am not one for reading; it's not what I would ever have chosen; it is all Lottie, with her nagging and her pushing. And so I

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may go home and tell her you don't think me fit for anything?' he added suddenly, with a slight break of unexpected feeling in his voice.

'Don't do anything of the kind. If you would only be open with me, tell me what are your own ideas and intentions——'

'That's what everybody says,' said Law, with a smile of half-amused superiority; 'open your mind. But what if you've got no mind to open? *I* don't care what I do; I don't intend anything; get me in somewhere, and I'll do the best I can. A fellow can't speak any fairer than that.'

The Minor Canon looked at him with that gaze of baffled inquiry which is never so effectually foiled as by the candid youth who has no intentions of his own and no mind to open. Law stood before him, stretching out his useless strength, with his useless book again under his arm—a human being thoroughly wasted; no place for him in the Civil Service, no good use in any of the offices. Why shouldn't he 'list if he wished it? It was the very best thing for him to do. But when Mr. Ashford thought of Lottie this straightforward conclusion died on his lips.

'Why couldn't you live on your pay?' he said hurriedly. 'It is only to exercise a little self-denial. You would have a life you liked

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and were fit for, and a young subaltern has just as much pay as any clerkship you could get. Why not make an effort, and determine to live on your pay? If you have the resolution you could do it. It would be better certainly than sitting behind a desk all day long.'

'Wouldn't it!' said Law, with a deep breath. 'Ah! but you wouldn't require to keep a horse, sitting behind your desk; you wouldn't have your mess to pay. A fellow must think of all that. I suppose you've had enough of me?' he added, looking up with a doubtful smile. 'I may go away?'

'Don't go yet.' There sprang up in the Minor Canon's mind a kindness for this impracticable yet thoroughly practical-minded boy, who was not wise enough to be good for anything, yet who was too wise to plunge into rash expenses and the arduous exertion of living on an officer's pay—curious instance of folly and wisdom, for even an officer's pay was surely better than no pay at all. Mr. Ashford did not want to throw Law off, and yet he could not tell what to do with him. 'Will you stay and try how much you can follow of young Uxbridge's work?' he said. 'I daresay you have not for the moment anything much better to do.'

Law gave a glance of semi-despair from the window upon the landscape, and the distance,

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and the morning sunshine. No! he had nothing better to do. It was not that he had any pleasures in hand, for pleasures cost money, and he had no money to spend; and he knew by long experience that lounging about in the morning without even a companion is not very lively. Still he yielded and sat down, with a sigh. Mere freedom was something, and the sensation of being obliged to keep in one place for an hour or two, and give himself up to occupation, was disagreeable; a fellow might as well be in an office at once. But he submitted. 'Young Uxbridge?' he said. 'What is he going in for? The Guards, I suppose.' Law sighed; ah! that was the life. But he was aware that for himself he might just as easily aspire to be a prince as a Guardsman. He took his seat at the table resignedly, and pulled the books towards him, and looked at them with a dislike that was almost pathetic. Hateful tools! but nothing was to be done without them. If he could only manage to get in somewhere by means of the little he knew of them, Law vowed in his soul he would never look at the rubbish again.

Young Uxbridge, when he came in spick and span, in the freshest of morning coats and fashionable ties—for which things Law had a keen eye, though he could not indulge in them—

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looked somewhat askance at the slouching figure of the new pupil. But, though he was the son of a canon and in the best society, young Uxbridge was not more studious, and he was by nature even less gifted, than Law. Of two stupid young men, one may have all the advantage over another which talent can give, without having any talent to brag of. Law was very dense with respect to books, but he understood a great deal more quickly what was said to him, and had a play of humour and meaning in his face, a sense of the amusing and absurd, if nothing more, which distinguished him from his companion, who was steadily level and obtuse all round, and never saw what anything meant. Thus, though one knew more than the other, the greater ignoramus was the more agreeable pupil of the two; and the Minor Canon began to take an amused interest in Law as Law. He kept him to luncheon after the other was gone, and encouraged the boy to talk, giving him such a meal as Law had only dreamt of. He encouraged him to talk, which perhaps was not quite right of Mr. Ashford, and heard a great deal about his family, and found out that, though Lottie was right, Law was not perhaps so utterly wrong as he thought. Law was very wrong; yet when he thus heard both sides of the question, the Minor Canon perceived that it was pos-

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sible to sympathise with Lottie in her forlorn and sometimes impatient struggle against the *vis inertiæ* of this big brother, and yet on the other hand to have an amused pity for the big brother, too, who was not brutal but only dense, gaping with wonder at the finer spirit that longed and struggled to stimulate him into something above himself. So stimulated Law never would be. He did not understand even what she wanted, what she would have; but he was not without some good in him. No doubt he would make an excellent settler in the backwoods, working hard there though he would not work here, and ready to defend himself against any tribe of savages; and he would not make a bad soldier. But to be stimulated into a first-class man in an examination, or an any-class man, to be made into a male Lottie of fine perceptions and high ambition, that was what Law would never be.

'But she is quite right,' said Law; 'something must be done. I suppose you have heard, Mr. Ashford, as everybody seems to have heard, that the governor is going to marry again?'

'I did hear it. Will that make a great difference to your sister and you?'

'Difference? I should think it would make a difference. As it happens, I know P——,

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the woman he is going to marry. She makes no secret of it that grown-up sons and daughters shouldn't live at home. I shall have to leave, whatever happens; and Lottie—well, in one way Lottie has more need to leave than I have: I shouldn't mind her manners and that sort of thing—but Lottie does mind.'

'Very naturally,' said the Minor Canon.

'Perhaps,' said Law; 'but I don't know where she gets her ideas from, for we never were so very fine. However, I might stand it, but Lottie never will be able to stand it; and the question follows, what is she to do? For myself, as I say, I could 'list, and there would be an end of the matter.'

'But in that case you would not be of much use to your sister.'

Law shrugged his shoulders. 'I should be of use to myself, which is the first thing. And then, you know—but perhaps you don't know—all this is obstinacy on Lottie's part, for she might be as well off as anyone. She might, if she liked, instead of wanting help, be able to help us all. She might start me for somewhere or other, or even make me an allowance, so that I could get into the army in the right way. When I think of what she is throwing away it makes me furious; she might make my fortune if she liked—and be very comfortable herself, too.'

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'And how is all this to be done?' said the Minor Canon somewhat tremulously, with a half-fantastic horror in his mind of some brutal alternative that might be in Lottie's power, some hideous marriage or sacrifice of the conventional kind. He waited for Law's answer in more anxiety than he had any right to feel, and Law on his side had a gleam of righteous indignation in his eyes, and for the moment felt himself the victim of a sister's cruelty, defrauded by her folly and unkindness of a promotion which was his due.

'Look here,' he said solemnly; 'all this she could do without troubling herself one bit, if she chose; she confessed it to me herself. The Signor has made her an offer to bring her out as a singer, and to teach her himself first for nothing. That is to say, of course, she would pay him, I suppose, when he had finished her, and she had got a good engagement. You know they make loads of money, these singers —and she has got as fine a voice as any of them. Well, now, fancy, Mr. Ashford, knowing that she could set us all up in this way, and give me a thorough good start—she's refused; and after that she goes and talks about me!'

For a moment Mr. Ashford was quite silenced by this sudden assault. A bold thrust is not to be met by fine definitions, and for the

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first moment the Minor Canon was staggered. Was there not some natural justice in what the lout said? Then he recovered himself.

'But,' he said, 'there are a great many objections to being a singer.' He was a little inarticulate, the sudden attack having taken away his breath. 'A lady might well have objections; and the family might have objections.'

'Oh! I don't mind,' said Law; 'if I did I should soon have told her; and you may be sure the governor doesn't mind. Not likely! The thing we want is money, and she could make as much money as ever she pleases. And yet she talks about me! I wish I had her chance; the Signor would not have to speak twice; I would sing from morning to night if they liked.'

'Would you work so hard as that? Then why don't you work a little at your books; the one is not harder than the other?'

'Work! Do you call singing a lot of songs *work?*' said the contemptuous Law.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

GOOD ADVICE.

'Oh, he did not say much,' Law replied to Lottie's questioning when he went home in the afternoon. 'He was very jolly—asked me to stay, and gave me lunch. How they live, those fellows! Cutlets, and cold grouse, and *pâté de foie gras*—something like. You girls think you know about housekeeping; you only know how to pinch and scrape, that's all.'

Lottie did not reply, as she well might, that *pâtés de foie gras* were not bought off such allowances as hers; she answered rather with feminine heat, as little to the purpose as her brother's taunt, 'As if it mattered what we ate! If you had grouse or if you had bread-and-cheese, what difference does it make? You care for such mean things, and nothing at all about your character or your living. *What* did Mr. Ashford say?'

'My character?' said Law. 'I've done nothing wrong. As for my living, I'm sure I don't know how *that's* to be got, neither does

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he. He thinks I should emigrate or go into the army—just what I think myself. He's *very* jolly; a kind of man that knows what you mean, and don't just go off on his own notions. I think,' said Law, 'that he thinks it very queer of you, when you could set me up quite comfortably, either in the army or abroad, not to do it. He did not say much, but I could see that he thought it very queer.'

'I—could set you up—what is it you mean, Law?' Lottie was too much surprised at first to understand. 'How could I set you up?' she went on, faltering. 'You don't mean that you told Mr. Ashford about—— Oh, Law, you are cruel. Do you want to bring us down to the dust, and leave us no honour, no reputation at all? First thinking to enlist as a common soldier, and then—me!'

'Well, then you. Why not you as well as me, Lottie? You've just as good a right to work as I have; you're the eldest. If I am to be bullied for not reading, which I hate, why should you refuse to sing, which you like? Why, you're always squalling all over the place, even when there's nobody to hear you—you could make a very good living by it; and what's more,' said Law, with great gravity, 'be of all the use in the world to me.'

'How could I be of use to you?' said Lottie,

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dropping her work upon her knee and looking up at him with wondering eyes. This was a point of view which had not struck her before, but she had begun to perceive that her indignation was wasted, and that it was she only in her family who had any idea that a girl should be spared anything. 'Law,' she said piteously, 'do you think it is because I don't want to work? Am I ever done working? You do a little in the morning, but I am at it all the day. Do you think Mary could keep the house as it is and do everything?'

'Pshaw!' answered Law, 'anybody could do that.'

Lottie was not meek by nature, and it was all she could do to restrain her rising temper. 'Mary has wages, and I have none,' she said. 'I don't mind the work; but if there is one difference between the common people and gentlefolk, it is that girls who are ladies are not sent out to work. It is for men to work out in the world, and for women to work at home. Would you like everybody to be able to pay a shilling and go and see your sister? Oh, Law, it is for you as much as for me that I am speaking. Everybody free to stare and to talk, and I standing there before them all, to sing whatever they told me, and to be cheered, perhaps, and people clapping their hands at me—at me, your

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sister, a girl—— Law! you would not have it; I know you could not bear it. You would rush and pull me away, and cover me with a cloak, and hide me from those horrible people's eyes.'

'Indeed I should do nothing of the sort,' said Law; 'I'd clap you too—I should like it. If they were hissing it would be a different matter. Besides, you know, you could change your name. They all change their names. You might be Miss Smith, which would hurt nobody. Come, now, if you are going to be reasonable, Lottie, and discuss the matter—why, your great friend Miss Huntington sang at a concert once—not for any good, not to be paid for it—only to make an exhibition of herself (and she was not much to look at either). Don't you remember? It would be nothing worse than that, and heaps of ladies do that. Then it is quite clear you must do something, and what else would you like to do?'

Lottie frowned a little, not having taken this question into consideration, as it would have been right for her to do; but the things that concerned other people had always seemed to her so much more important. She never had any doubt of her own capabilities and energies. When the question was thus put to her she paused.

'Just now I am at home; I have plenty to

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do,' she said. Then, after another pause, 'If things change here—if I cannot stay here, Law, why shouldn't we go together? You must get an appointment, and I would take care of you. I could make the money go twice as far as you would. I could help you if you had work to do at home—copying or anything—I would do it. It would not cost more for two of us than for one. I could do everything for you, even your washing; and little things besides. Oh, I don't doubt I could get quantities of little things to do,' said Lottie, with a smile of confidence in her own powers; 'and no one need be the wiser. You would be thought to have enough for us both.'

'Listen to me, now,' said Law, who had shown many signs of impatience, not to say consternation. 'What you mean is (*if* you know what you mean), that you intend to live upon me. You needn't stare; you don't think what you're saying, but that is what you really mean when all is done. Look here, Lottie; if I were to get a place I should live in lodgings. I should bring in other fellows to see me. I shouldn't want to have my sister always about. As for not spending a penny more, that means that you would give me dinners like what we have now; but when I have anything to live on, of my own, I shall not stand that. I shall not

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be content, I can tell you, to live as we live now. I want to be free if I get an appointment; I don't want to have you tied round my neck like a millstone; I want to have my liberty and enjoy myself. If it comes to that, I'd rather marry than have a sister always with me; but at first I shall want to have my fling and enjoy myself. And what is the use of having money,' said Law, with the genuine force of conviction, 'unless you can spend it upon yourself?'

Lottie was altogether taken by surprise. It was the first time they had thus discussed the question. She made no reply to this utterance of sound reason. She sat with her work on her knee, and her hands resting upon it, staring at her brother. This revelation of his mind was to her altogether new.

'But, on the other side,' said Law, feeling more and more confidence in himself as he became used to the sound of his own voice, and felt himself to be unanswerable, 'on the other side, a singer gets jolly pay—far better than any young fellow in an office; and you could quite well afford to give me an allowance, so that I might get into the army as a fellow ought. You might give me a hundred or two a year and never feel it; and with that I could live upon my pay. And you needn't be afraid that I should be ashamed of you,' said generous Law;

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'not one bit. I should stand by you and give you my countenance as long as you conducted yourself to my satisfaction. I should never forsake you: When you sang anywhere I'd be sure to go and clap you like a madman, especially if you went under another name (they all do); that would leave me more free. Now you must see, Lottie, a young fellow in an office could not be much good to you, but you could be of great use to me.'

Still Lottie did not make any reply. No more terrible enlightenment ever came to an unsuspecting listener. She saw gradually rising before her as she spoke, not only a new Law, but a new version of herself till this moment unknown to her. This, as was natural, caught her attention most; it made her gasp with horror and affright. Was this herself—Lottie? It was the Lottie her brother knew. That glimpse of herself through Law's eyes confounded her. She seemed to see the coarse and matter-of-fact young woman who wanted to live upon her brother's work; to make his dinners scanty in order that she might have a share, to interfere with his companions and his pleasures—so distinctly, that her mouth was closed and her very heart seemed to stop beating. Was this herself? Was this how she appeared to other people's eyes? She was

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too much thunderstruck, overawed by it, to say anything. The strange difference between this image and her own self-consciousness, her conviction that it was for Law's advantage she had been struggling; her devotion to the interests of the family before everything, filled her with confusion and bewilderment. Could it be she that was wrong, or was it he that was unjust and cruel? The wonder and suddenness of it gave more poignant and terrible force to the image of her which was evidently in Law's mind. All the selfish obtuseness of understanding, the inability to perceive what she meant, or to understand the object of her anxiety, which had so wounded and troubled her in Law, her brother had found in her. To him it was apparent that what Lottie wanted was not his good, but that she might have some one to work for her, some one to save her from working. She gazed not at Law, but at the visionary representation of herself which Law was seeing, with a pang beyond any words. She could not for the moment realise the brighter image which he made haste to present before her of the generous sister who made him an allowance, and enabled him to enter the army 'as a fellow ought,' and of whom he promised never to be ashamed. It is much to be doubted whether Lottie had any warm sense

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of humour at the best of times; certainly she showed herself quite devoid of it now. She was so hurt and sore that she could not speak. It was not true. How could he be so cruel and unjust to her? But yet could it be at all true? Was it possible that this coarse picture was like Lottie, would be taken for Lottie by anyone else? She kept looking at him after he had stopped speaking, unable to take her eyes from him, looking like a dumb creature who has no other power of remonstrance. Perhaps in other circumstances Lottie would have been so foolish and childish as to cry; now she battled vaguely, dismally, with a sense of heartbreaking injustice, yet asking herself could any part of it be true?

'Don't stare at me so,' said Law; 'you look as if you had never seen a fellow before. Though he was civil and did not say anything, it was easy to see that was what old Ashford thought. And I've got to go back to him to-morrow, if that will please you; and, by the way, he said he'd perhaps come and see you and tell you what he thought. By Jove, it's getting late. If I don't get out at once he'll come and palaver, and I shall have to stay in and lose my afternoon, as I lost the morning. I'm off, Lottie. You need not wait for me for tea.'

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It did not make much difference to her when he went away, plunging down the little staircase in two or three long steps. Lottie sat like an image in stone, all the strength taken from her. She seemed to have nothing left to say to herself—no ground to stand on, no self-explanation to offer. She had exhausted all her power of self-assertion for the moment; now she paused and looked at herself as her father and brother saw her—a hard, scanty, parsimonious housekeeper, keeping them on the simplest fare, denying them indulgences, standing in their way. What if she kept the house, as she fondly hoped, like a gentleman's house, sweet and fresh, and as fair as its faded furniture permitted? What did they care for tidiness and order? What if she managed, by infinite vigilance and precaution, to pay her bills and keep the credit of the household, so far as her power went, unimpaired? They did not mind debts and duns, except at the mere moment of encountering the latter, and were entirely indifferent to the credit of the name. She was in her father's way, who before this time would have married the woman who brushed past Lottie on the Slopes but for having this useless grown-up daughter, whom he did not know how to dispose of; and if Law got an appointment (that almost impossible, yet

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fondly cherished, expectation which had kept a sort of forlorn brightness in the future), it now turned out that she would be in Law's way as much or more than in her father's. Lottie's heart contracted with pain; her spirit failed her. She, who had felt so strong, so capable, so anxious to inspire others with her own energy and force; she, who had felt herself the support of her family, their standard-bearer, the only one who was doing anything to uphold the falling house—in a moment she had herself fallen too, undermined even in her own opinion. Many a blow and thrust had she received in the course of her combative life, and given back with vigour and a stout heart. Never before had she lost her confidence in herself; the certainty that she was doing her best, that with her was the redeeming force, the honourable principle which might yet convert the others, and save the family, and elevate the life of the house. What she felt now was that she herself, the last prop of the Despards, was overthrown and lying in ruin. Was it possible that she was selfish too, seeking her own ease like the rest, avoiding what she disliked just the same as they did? A sudden moisture of intense pain suffused Lottie's eyes. She was too heartstruck, too fallen to weep. She covered her face with her hands, though there

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was no one to cover it from, with the natural gesture of anguish, seeking to be hidden even from itself.

Lottie did not pay much attention, although she heard steps coming up the stair. What did it matter? Either it was Law, who had stricken her so wantonly to the ground; or her father, who did not care what happened to her; or Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who did not count. Few other people mounted the stairs to the little drawing-room in Captain Despard's house. But when she raised her head, all pale and smileless, and saw that the visitor was Mr. Ashford, Lottie scarcely felt that this was a stranger, or that there was any occasion to exert herself and change her looks and tones. Did not he think so too? She rose up, putting down her work, and made him a solemn salutation. She did not feel capable of anything more. The Minor Canon drew back his hand, which she did not see, with the perturbation of a shy man repulsed. Lottie was not to him so unimportant a person as she was to her brother. She was surrounded by all the unconscious state of womanhood and mystery and youth—a creature with qualities beyond his ken, wonderful to him, as unknown though visible, and attracting his imagination more than any other of these wonderful mystic creatures, of whom he had

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naturally encountered many in his life, had ever done. His heart, which had so swelled with pity and admiration on Sunday evening, was not less sympathetic and admiring now, notwithstanding that it was through Law's eyes that he had been seeing her to-day; and this repulse, which was so unlike her candour and frankness yesterday, gave him a little pain. He wanted to be of use to her, and he wanted to tell her so—and to repel him while he had these generous purposes in his mind seemed hard. He sat down, however, embarrassed, on the chair she pointed him to; and looking at her, when thus brought nearer, he discovered, even with his short-sighted eyes, how pale she was and how woebegone. Some one had been vexing her, no doubt, poor child! This took the shyness out of Mr. Ashford's voice.

'I have come to make my report,' he said, in as even a tone as he could command, 'about Lawrence. He has told you—that he has been with me most part of the day?'

'Yes.' When Lottie saw that more than this monosyllable was expected from her, she made an effort to rouse herself. 'I fear it is not anything very encouraging that you have to say?'

'I have two things to say, Miss Despard—if you will permit me. Did you ever read

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Lord Chesterfield's Letters? But no, perhaps they are not reading for such as you. There are many wickednesses in them which would disgust you, but there is one most tragic, touching thing in them——'

He made a pause; and Lottie, who was young and variable, and ready to be interested in spite of herself, looked up and asked 'What is that?'

'I wonder if I may say it?—it is the effort of the father to put himself—not a good man, but a fine, subtle, ambitious, aspiring spirit—into his son; and the complete and terrible failure of the attempt.'

'I do not know—what that can have to do with Law and me.'

'Yes. Pardon me for comparing you in your generous anxiety to a man who was not a hero. But, Miss Despard, you see what I mean. You will never put yourself into Law. He does not understand you; he is not capable of it. You must give up the attempt. I am only a new acquaintance, but I think I must be an old friend, somehow. I want you to give up the attempt.'

He looked at her with such a kind comprehension and pity in his eyes, that Lottie's heart sprang up a little from its profound depression, like a trodden-down flower, to meet this first

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gleam of sunshine. She did not quite see what he meant even now, but it was something that meant kindness and approval of her. 'He cannot think *that* of me!' she said to herself.

'I am glad you will hear me out,' he said, with a look of relief, 'for the rest is better. Law is not stupid. He would not be your brother if he were stupid. He is a little too prudent, I think. He will not hear of emigrating, because he has no money, nor of trying for the army, because he could not live on his pay. Right enough, perhaps, in both cases; but a hot-headed boy would not mind these considerations, and a fellow of resolution might succeed in either way.'

'He has always been like that,' said Lottie. 'You see Law does not want anything very much, except to be as well off as possible. He would never make up his mind what to try for. He says, anything; and anything means—— Oh! Mr. Ashford, I want to ask you something about myself. Do you think it is just as bad and selfish of me to refuse to be—oh! a public singer? I thought I was right,' said Lottie, putting out her hands with unconscious dramatic action, as if groping her way; 'but now I am all in doubt. I don't know what to think. Is it just the same? Is it as bad of me?'

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She looked at him anxiously, as if he could settle the question, and the Minor Canon did not know what reply to make. He was on both sides—feeling with her to the bottom of his heart; yet seeing, too, where the reason lay.

'I am very sure you are doing nothing either bad or selfish,' he said; but hesitated, and added no more.

'You won't tell me,' she cried; 'that must mean that you are against me. Mr. Ashford, I have always heard that there was a great difference between girls and boys; like this: that for a boy to work was always honourable, but for a girl to work was letting down the family. Mamma—I don't know if she was a good judge—always said so. She said it was better to do anything than work, so as that people should know. There was a lady, who was an officer's wife, just as good as we were, but they all said she was a governess once, and were disagreeable to her. It seemed a kind of disgrace to all the children. Their mother was a governess——'

'But that is very bad; very cruel,' said the Minor Canon. 'I am sure, in your heart, that is not a thing of which you can approve.'

'No,' said Lottie, doubtfully; 'except just this—that it would be far more credit, far more *right*, if the men were to try hard and keep the

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girls at home. That is what I thought. Oh, it is not the work I think of! Work! I like it. I don't mind what I do. But there must always be somebody for the work at home. Do you suppose Mary could manage for them if I were not here? There would be twice as much spent, and everything would be different. And do you not think, Mr. Ashford, that it would be more credit to them—better for everyone, more honourable for Law, if he were at work and I at home, rather than that people should say, "His sister is a singer?" Ah! would you let your own sister be a singer if you were as poor as we are? Or would you rather fight it out with the world, and keep her safe at home, only serving you?'

'My sister!' said the Minor Canon. He was half-affronted, half-touched, and wholly unreasonable. 'That she should never do! not so long as her brother lived to work for her—nor would I think it fit either that she should serve me.'

'Ah, but there you are wrong,' said Lottie, whose face was lighted up with a smile of triumph. 'I thought you would be on my side! But there you are wrong. She would be happy, proud to serve you. Do you think I mean we are to be idle, not to take our share? Oh, no, no! In nature a man works and rests; but a

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woman never rests. Look at the poor people. The man has his time to himself in the evenings, and his wife serves him. It is quite right—it is her share. I should never, never grumble at that. Only,' cried Lottie, involuntarily clasping her hands, 'not to be sent outside to work there! I keep Mary for the name of the thing; because it seems right to have a servant; but if we could not afford to keep Mary do you think I would make a fuss? Oh, no, Mr. Ashford, no! I could do three times what she does. I should not mind what I did. But if it came to going out, to having it known, to letting people say, "His sister is a governess," or (far worse) "His sister is a singer"—it is that I cannot bear.'

Mr. Ashford was carried away by this torrent of words, and by the natural eloquence of her eyes and impassioned voice, and varying countenance. He did not know what to say. He shook his head, but when he came to himself, and found his footing again, made what stand he could. 'You forget,' he said, 'that all this would be of no use for yourself or your future——'

'For me!' Lottie took the words out of his mouth with a flush and glow of beautiful indignation. 'Was it *me* I was thinking of? Oh, I thought you understood!' she cried.

'Let me speak, Miss Despard. Yes, I un-

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derstand. You would be their servant; you would work all the brightness of your life away. You would never think of yourself; and when it suited them to make a change—say when it suited Law to marry—you would be thrown aside, and you would find yourself without a home, wearied, worn out with your work, disappointed, feeling the thanklessness, the bitterness of the world.'

Lottie's face clouded over. She looked at him, half-defiant, half-appealing. 'That is not how—one's brother would behave. You would not do it——'

'No; perhaps I would not do it—but, on the other hand,' said Mr. Ashford, 'I might do—what was as bad. I might make a sacrifice. I might—give up marrying the woman whom I loved for my sister's sake. Would that be a better thing to do?'

Their eyes met when he spoke of the woman he loved—that is, he looked at Lottie, who was gazing intently at him; and, strangely enough, they could not tell why, both blushed, as if the sudden contact of their looks had set their faces aglow. Lottie instinctively drew back without knowing it; and he, leaning towards her, repeated, almost with vehemence:

'Would that be a better thing to do?'

Lottie hid her face in her hands. 'Oh, no,

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no!' she said, her sensitive frame trembling. Mr. Ashford was old, and Law was but a boy—how could there be any question of the woman either loved?

'Forgive me, Miss Despard, if I seem to go against you—my heart is all with you; but you ought to be independent,' he said. 'Either the woman would be sacrificed or the man would be sacrificed. And that kind of sacrifice is bad for everybody. Don't be angry with me. Sacrifices generally are bad; the more you do for others, the more selfish they become. Have you not seen that even in your little experience? There are many people who never have it in their power to be independent; but those who have should not neglect it—even if it is not in a pleasant way.'

'Even if it is by—being a singer?' She lifted her head again, and once more fixed upon him eyes which were full of unshed tears. Taking counsel had never been in Lottie's way; but neither had doubt ever been in her way till now. Everything before had been very plain. Right and wrong—two broad lines straight before her; now there was right and wrong on both sides, and her landmarks were removed. She looked at her adviser as women look, to see not only what he said, but whatsoever shade of unexpressed opinion might cross his face.

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'It is not so dreadful after all,' he said. 'It is better than many other ways. I am afraid life is hard, as you say, upon a girl, Miss Despard. She must be content with little things. This is one of the few ways in which she can really get independence—and—stop, hear me out—the power to help others too.'

Lottie had almost begun a passionate remonstrance; but these last words stopped her. Though she might not like the way, still was it possible that this might be a way of setting everything right? She stopped gazing at her counsellor, her eyelids puckered with anxiety, her face quite colourless, and expressing nothing but this question. Not a pleasant way—a way of martyrdom to her pride—involving humiliation, every pang she could think of; but still, perhaps, a way of setting everything right.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

A CRISIS.

When Lottie got up next morning the world seemed to have changed to her. It had changed a little in reality, as sometimes one day differs from another in autumn, the world having visibly made a more marked revolution than usual in a single night. It had got on to the end of August, and there were traces of many fiery fingers upon the leaves on the Slopes. It had been a very fine summer, but it was coming prematurely to an end, everybody said, and about the horizon there began to be veils of luminous mist in the morning, and soft haze that veiled the evening light. This autumnal aspect of the world seemed to have come on in that one night. The Virginian creeper round the window had 'turned' in several patches of scarlet and yellow all at once. It was beautiful, but it was the first step towards winter and the chills—the first evidence of a year decaying which makes the spectator pause and think. When Lottie woke she felt in her heart that

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consciousness of something, she knew not what, something that had happened to her, that overshadowed her, and forced itself upon her before she could tell what it was, which is the way care manifests itself at our bedsides: something that made her heart heavy the first thing on awaking. Then she remembered what it was. Lottie, we have said, was not a girl who was in the habit of taking advice; but for that once she had taken it, seizing upon the first trustworthy witness she could find who would bring an impartial eye to the problem of her life. She had been very strong in her own opinion before, but when reason was put before her Lottie could not shut her eyes to it. Neither could she dawdle and delay when there was anything to do. She awoke with the consciousness that some ghost was lurking behind her white curtains. Then with a start and shiver remembered and realised it, and, drawing herself together, made up her mind to act at once. What was the use of putting off? Putting off was the reason why Law was so backward, and Lottie was not one of those who let the grass grow under their feet. The more disagreeable the first step was, the more reason was there that it should be taken to-day. She went downstairs with a gleam of resolution in her eyes. After the shock of finding out that there is a painful

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thing to do, the determination to do it at once is a relief. It brings an almost pleasure into the pain to set your face to it bravely and get done with it; there is thus an exhilaration even in what is most disagreeable. So Lottie felt. Her despondency and depression were gone. She had something definite to do, and she would do it, let what obstacle soever stand in the way. She made the family tea and cut the bread with more energy than usual. She was the first visible, as she always was, but her mind was fully occupied with her own affairs, and she was glad enough to be alone for half an hour. After that she had to go up again and knock at her father's door, to remind him that there was but little time for breakfast before the bell began to ring for matins; but she had taken her own breakfast and begun her work before the Captain and Law came downstairs. When she had poured out their tea for them she sat down in the window-seat with her sewing. She did not take any share in their talk, neither did she watch, as she often did, the stir of morning life in the Dean's Walk—the tradesmen's carts going about, the perambulators from the town pushing upward, with fresh nursemaids behind, to the shady walk on the Slopes; now and then a tall red soldier showing against the grey wall of the Abbey opposite; the old Chevaliers be-

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ginning to turn out, taking their little morning promenade before the bells began. The stir was usually pleasant to Lottie, but she took no notice of it to-day. She was going to matins herself this morning—not perhaps altogether for devotion, but with the idea, after the service, of lying in wait at the north gate for the exit of the Signor.

How it was that the subject came under discussion Lottie did not know. She woke to it only when it came across herself and touched upon her own thoughts. It was Law who was saying something (it was fit for him to say so!), grumbling about the inequality of education, and that girls had just as good a right to work as boys.

'I should like to know,' he said, 'why I should have to get hold of a lot of books, and trot over to old Ashford, and work like a slave till one o'clock, while she sits as cool and as fresh as can be, and never stirs?' He was not addressing anybody in particular, but grumbling to the whole world at large, which was Law's way. Generally his father took no notice of him, but some prick of sensation in the air no doubt moved him to-day,

'Speak of things you know something about,' said the Captain; 'that's the best advice I can give you, Law. And let Lottie alone.

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Who wants her to work? The fresher she looks and the better she looks, the more likely she is to get a husband; and that's a girl's first duty. Is that the bell?' said Captain Despard, rising, drawing himself up, and pulling his collar and wristbands into due display. 'Let me hear nothing about work. No daughter of mine shall ever disgrace herself and me in that way. Get yourself a husband, my child; that's the only work I'll ever permit—that's all a lady can do. A good husband, Lottie. If I heard of some one coming forward I'd be happier, I don't deny. Bring him to the scratch, my dear; or if you're in difficulty refer him to me.'

He was gone before Lottie could utter a word of the many that rushed to her lips. She turned upon Law instead, who sat and chuckled behind his roll. 'If it had not been for you he would not have insulted me so!' she cried.

'Oh, insulted you! You need not be so grand. They say you may have Purcell if you like,' said Law, 'or even the Signor; but it's the other fellow, Ridsdale, you know, your old flame, the governor is thinking of. If you could catch *him* now! though I don't believe a fellow like that could mean anything. But even Purcell is better than nothing. If you would take my advice——'

Lottie did not stay to hear any more. He

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laughed as she rushed out of the room, putting up her hands to her ears. But Law was surprised that she did not strike a blow for herself before she left him. Her self-restraint had a curious effect upon the lad. 'Is anything up?' he said to himself. Generally it was no difficult matter to goad Lottie to fury with allusions like this. He sat quite still and listened while she ran upstairs into her own room, which was overhead. Then Law philosophically addressed himself to what was left of the breakfast. He had an excellent appetite; and the bell ringing outside which called so many people, but not him, and the sight of the old Chevaliers streaming across the road, and the morning congregation hurrying along to the door in the cloisters, pleased him as he finished his meal, without even his sister's eye upon him to remark the ravages he made in the butter. But when he heard Lottie's step coming down stairs again Law stopped, not without a sense of guilt, and listened intently. She did not come in, which was a relief, but his surprise was great when he heard her walk past the open door of the little dining-room, and next moment saw her flit past the window on the way to the Abbey. He got up, though he had not finished, and stared after her till she, too, disappeared in the cloister. 'Something must be up,' he repeated to himself.

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Lottie's silence, however, was not patience, neither was it any want of susceptibility to what had been said. Even this, probably, she would have felt more had her mind not been preoccupied by her great resolution. But when she found herself in the Abbey, abstracted from all external circumstances, the great voice of the organ filling the beautiful place, the people silently filling up the seats, the choir in their white robes filing in, it seemed very strange to Lottie that the service could go on as it did, undisturbed by the beats of her heart and the commotion of her thoughts. Enough trouble and tumult to drown even the music were in that one corner where she leant her shoulder against the old dark oak, finding some comfort in the physical support. And she did not, it must be allowed, pay very much attention to the service; her voice joined in the responses fitfully, but her heart wandered far away. No, not far away. Mr. Ashford's counsel, and her father's, kept coming and going through her mind. Truth to tell, Captain Despard's decision against the possibility of work gave work an instant value in his daughter's eyes. We do not defend Lottie for her undutifulness; but as most of the things she had cared for in her life had been opposed by her father, and all the things against which she set her face in fierce-

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ness of youthful virtue were supported by him, it could scarcely be expected that his verdict would be very effectual with her. It gave her a little spirit and encouragement in her newly-formed resolution, and it helped her a little to overcome the prejudice in her mind when she felt that her father was in favour of that prejudice. He did not want her to work, to bring the discredit of a daughter who earned her own living upon him; he wanted to sell her to any one who would offer for her, to make her 'catch' some man, to put forth wiles to attract him and bring him into her net. Lottie, who believed in love, and who believed in womanhood, with such a faith as perhaps girls only possess: what silent rage and horror filled her at this thought! She believed in womanhood, not so much in herself. For the sake of that abstraction, not for her own, she wanted to be wooed reverently, respected above all. A man, to be a perfect man, ought to look upon every woman as a princess of romance: not for her individual sake so much as for his sake, that he might fall short of no nobleness and perfection. This was Lottie's theory throughout. She would have Law reverence his sister, and tenderly care for her, because that would prove Law to be of the noblest kind of men. She wanted to be worshipped in order to prove triumphantly to herself that the man who

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did so was an heroic lover. This was how Rollo had caught her imagination, her deceived imagination, which put into Rollo's looks and words so much that was not really there. This simple yet superlative thread of romance ran through all her thoughts. She leaned back upon the carved oak of the stall, preoccupied, while the choristers chanted, thinking more of all this than of the service. And then, with a sudden pang, there came across her mind the thought of the descent that would be necessary from that white pedestal of her maidenhood, the sheltered and protected position of the girl at home, which alone seemed to be fit and right. She would have to descend from that, and gather up her spotless robes about her, and come out to encounter the storms of the world. All that had elevated her in her own conceit was going from her—and what, oh! what could *he*, or anyone, find afterwards in her? He would turn away most likely with a sigh or groan from a girl who could thus throw away her veil and her crown and stand up and confront the world. Lottie seemed to see her downfall with the eyes of her visionary lover, and the anguish that brought with it crushed her very heart.

Did it ever occur to her that an alternative had been offered for her acceptance? Once, for a moment, she saw Purcell's melancholy face

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look down upon her from the organ-loft, and gave him a kind, half-sad, half-amused momentary thought. Poor fellow! she could have cried for the pain she must have given him, and yet she could have laughed, though she was ashamed of the impulse. Poor boy! it must have been only a delusion; he would forget it; he would find somebody of his own class, she said to herself, uneasy to think she had troubled him, yet with the only half-smile that circumstances had afforded her for days past. Captain Despard, had he known, would have thought Purcell's suit well worthy of consideration in the absence of a better; and the Signor, whom Lottie had made up her mind to address, darted fiery glances at her from the organ-loft, taking up his pupil's cause with heat and resentment; but she herself sailed serenely over the Purcell incident altogether, looking down upon it from supreme heights of superiority. It did not occur to her as a thing to be seriously thought of, much less in her confusion and anguish, as a reasonable way of escape. And thus the morning went on, the chanting and the reading, and all those outcries to God and appeals to His mercy which His creatures utter daily with so much calm. Did anybody mean it when they all burst forth, 'Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us?' This cry woke

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Lottie, and her dreaming soul came back, and she held up her clasped hands in a momentary passion of entreaty. The sudden wildness of the cry in the midst of all that stately solemnity of praying caught her visionary soul. It was as if all the rest had missed His ear, all the music and the poetry, King David harping on his harp, and Handel with his blind face raised to heaven; and nothing was left but to snatch at the garments of the Master as He went away, not hearing, not looking, or appearing not to look and hear. This poor young soul in the midst of her self-questionings and struggles woke up to the passionate reality of that cry. 'Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us!' and then it went away from her again in thunders of glorious music, in solemnity of well-known words, and she lost herself once more in her own thoughts.

Lottie withdrew timidly into the aisle when the service was over. She knew the Signor would pass that way, and it seemed to her that it would be easier to speak to him there than to go to his house, which was the only other alternative. But the Signor, when he came out, was encircled by a group of his pupils, and darted a vengeful, discouraging glance at her as he passed. He would not pause nor take any notice of the step she made towards him, the

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wistful look in her face. If he had seen it, it would have given him a certain pleasure to disappoint Lottie, for the Signor had a womanish element in him, and was hot and merciless in his partisanship. He cast a glance at her that might have slain her, that was as far from encouraging her as anything could be, and passed quickly by, taking no other notice. Thus her mission was fruitless; and it was the same in the afternoon, when she went out by the north door and made believe to be passing when the musician came out. To do him justice, he had no notion that she wanted him, but wondered a little to find her a second time in his way. He was obliged, as it was outside the Abbey, to take off his hat to her; but he did so in the most grudging, hasty way, and went on talking with his pupils, pretending to be doubly engaged and deeply interested in what the lads were saying. There was no chance then, short of going to his house, of carrying out her resolution for this day.

But in the evening, when all was still, Lottie, who had been sitting at home working and thinking till her heart was sick and her brain throbbing, put on her hat and went out in the dusk to get the air at the door. It was a lovely, quiet night, the moon rising over the grey pinnacles of the Abbey, marking out its

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great shadow upon the Dean's Walk, and the mignonette smelling sweet in all the little gardens. A few of the old Chevaliers were still about, breathing the sweetness of the evening like Lottie herself. Captain Temple, who was among them, came up to her with his old-fashioned fatherly gallantry as soon as he saw her. 'Will you take a turn, my dear?' he said. He had no child, and she had never had, so to speak, any father, at least in this way. They went up and down the terrace pavement, and then they crossed the road to the Abbey, from which, though it was so late, the tones of the great organ were beginning to steal out upon the night. 'Is this a ghost that is playing, or what can the Signor be thinking of?' Captain Temple said. Old Wykeham, that gruff old guardian of the sacred place, was standing with his keys in his hands at the south door. He had not his usual rusty gown nor his velvet cap, being then in an unofficial capacity; but Wykeham would not have been Wykeham without his keys. And though he was gruff he knew to whom respect was due. 'Yessir, there's something going on inside. One o' the Signor's fancies. He have got some friends inside, a playing his voluntaries to them. And if you like, Captain, I will let you in in a moment, sir.' 'Shall we go, my dear?' the old Captain said.

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And next moment they were in the great gloom of the Abbey, which was so different in its solemnity from the soft summer dark outside. There was a gleam of brilliant light in the organ-loft where the Signor was playing, which threw transverse rays out on either side into the darkness, showing vaguely the carved work of the canopies over the stalls, and the faded banners that hung over them. Down in the deep gloom of the choir below a few figures were dimly perceptible. Lottie and her kind old companion did not join these privileged listeners. They kept outside in the nave, where the moon, which had just climbed the height of the great windows, had suddenly burst in, throwing huge dimly-coloured pictures of the painted glass upon the floor. Lottie, who was not so sensible as she might have been, preferred this partial light, notwithstanding the mystic charm of the darkness, which was somewhat awful to look in upon through the open door of the choir. She put her hand, a little tremulous, on the old Captain's arm, and stood and listened, feeling all her troubles calmed. What was it that thus calmed her perturbed soul? She thought it was the awe of the place, the spell of the darkness and the moonlight, the music that made it all wonderful. The Signor was playing a strange piece of old music

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when the two came in. It was an old litany, and Lottie thought as she listened that she could hear an unseen choir in the far distance, high among the grey pinnacles, on the edge of the clouds, intoning in intricate delicate circles of harmony the responses. Was it the old monks? Was it the angels? Who could tell? 'Lottie, my love, that is the *vox humana* stop,' said the kind old Captain, who knew something about it; and as he, too, was no wiser than other people, he began to whisper an explanation to her of how it was. But Lottie cared nothing about stops. She could hear the solemn singers of the past quiring far off at some unseen altar, the softened distant sweetness of the reply. Her heart rose up into the great floating circling atmosphere of song. She seemed to get breath again, to get rest to her soul: a strange impulse came over her. She, who was so shy, so uncertain of her power, so bitterly unwilling to adopt the trade that was being forced upon her: it was all that she could do to keep herself from singing, joining to those mystical spiritual voices her own that was full of life and youth. Her breast swelled, her lips came apart, her voice all but escaped from her, soaring into that celestial distance. All at once the strain stopped, and she with it, coming down to the Abbey nave again, where she

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stood in the midst of the dim reflected rubies and amethysts and silvery whites of a great painted window, giddy and leaning upon the old Chevalier.

'It was the *vox humana*. It is too theatrical for my taste, my dear. It was invented by——'

'Oh, hush, hush!' cried Lottie, under her breath; 'he is beginning again.'

This time it was the 'Pastoral Symphony' the Signor played—music that was never intended for the chill of winter, but for the gleaming stars, the soft falling dews, the ineffable paleness and tenderness of spring. It came upon Lottie like those same dews from heaven. She grasped the old man's arm, but she could not keep herself from the response which no longer seemed to come back from any unseen and mystic shrine. Why should the old monks come back to sing, or the angels have the trouble, who have so much else to do, when Lottie was there? When the 'Pastoral Symphony' was over the Signor went on, and she with him. Surely there must have been some secret understanding that no one knew of—not themselves. He played on unconscious, and she lifted up her head to the moonlight and her voice to heaven and sang—

There were shepherds watching their flocks by night.

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Lottie let go her hold of the Captain's arm. She wanted no support now. She wanted nothing but to go on, to tell all that divine story from end to end. It got possession of her. She did not remember even the changes of the voices; the end of one strain and another was nothing to her. She sang through the whole of the songs that follow each other without a pause or a falter. And like her, without questioning, without hesitation, the Signor played on. It was not till she had proclaimed into the gloom that 'His yoke is easy and His burden light' that she came to herself. The last chords thrilled and vibrated through the great arches and died away in lingering echoes in the vast gloom of the roof. And then there was a pause.

Lottie came to herself. She was not overwhelmed and exhausted by the effort, as she had been at the Deanery. She felt herself come down, as out of heaven, and slowly became aware of Captain Temple looking at her with a disturbed countenance, and old Wykeham in all the agitation of alarm. 'If I'd have known I'd never have let you in. It's as much as my place is worth,' the old man was saying; and Captain Temple, very kindly and fatherly, but troubled too, and by no means happy, gave her his arm hurriedly. 'I think we had better

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go, my dear,' he said; 'I think we had better go.'

Some one stopped them at the door—some one who took her hand in his with a warmth which enthusiasm permitted.

'I knew it must be you, if it were not one of the angels,' he said; 'one or the other. I have just come; and what a welcome I have had—too good for a king!'

'I did not know you were here, Mr. Ridsdale,' said Lottie, faintly, holding fast by Captain Temple's arm.

'But I knew you were here; it was in the air,' he said, half-whispering. 'Good-night; but good-night lasts only till to-morrow, thank heaven.'

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CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT FOLLOWED.

CAPTAIN TEMPLE was not happy about the events of that evening. He had begun to grow very fond of Lottie, and he was not pleased that she should have 'made an exhibition of herself.' He went over it so often to his wife that Mrs. Temple learned the incident by heart. There was in her mind, mingled with an intense silent interest in the girl who was like her own, a feeling of repulsion too, equally intense and silent, which joined with the opposite sentiment, and kept Lottie as constantly present to her mind as she was in the Captain's talk. And, though it sometimes appeared to her that she would die of this girl, who reminded her at every step that she had lost her child, yet she could not check her husband's ever-flowing, continually repeated talk on the subject. Mrs. Temple thought this was all for his sake. Sometimes, in the bitterness of her loss, she would cry out that she loathed the very name of this other, who was so well

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and bright and full of life, while her child was dead and gone; but, notwithstanding, Lottie had gradually come to hold a large place in her life. How could she help thinking of her? Grudging her very life and brightness, repenting her grudge, praying God's blessing on the girl whom she thus injured, avoiding her, fearing the sight of her, watching for her whom she feared; how could it be but that Mrs. Temple, in her lonely hours, should think of Lottie? She was the confidant now of the old Captain's regret.

'I thought she was a sweet, modest girl,' he said, shaking his head; 'shy, even—as I like a girl to be—very like—— My dear, I cannot bear a girl to make an exhibition of herself——'

'But if there was no one to see her, and if you were in the dark?'

'That is true, my dear; but if they did not see her they heard her. Such a voice! I wish you had been there—but that sort of public use of it—and to have the confidence to sing when she was not asked!' Captain Temple shook his head. He seemed to have done nothing but shake his head since last night.

'Do you think that the more she has a beautiful voice the less she should let it be heard?' said his wife. 'I am not so taken up

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with this Miss Despard as you are; but still I think you are unjust to her.'

'Perhaps I am unjust to her. How can I help being taken up with her? If you knew her as well you would be taken up with her too. And I wish you did; it would be a comfort to you. In everything she does, her walk, every little gesture, I see something that reminds me—— I know you don't like to speak of it, my dear.'

Mrs. Temple set her face like a rock while the old Captain talked on. He did nothing but speak of it, and she would not stop him. Had she not noticed the girl's walk? When Lottie passed Mrs. Temple turned from the window, feeling as if some one had given her a blow. Yet what had she gone to the window for but to watch for Lottie? And she was more just to her than was the old Captain, who could not bear any falling off in his ideal, who thought that a girl should never make an exhibition of herself, and did nothing for a week after but shake his head.

The singing, however, made a great excitement in the Cloisters. It was only a select few who had been there to hear; and they thought it was all the Signor's arrangement, who had provided for them so much greater a pleasure than they expected—or, rather, an additional

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pleasure. 'Who was it?' everybody asked. Was it possible it could be little Rowley? But it was inconceivable that a mere child like that could have taken the contralto solo as well as the soprano. But was it certain that there was only one voice? The darkness was deceptive, and all the circumstances were so unusual, so out of the ordinary. When you came to think of it, it could not be one voice. It must have been little Rowley and Mellor, the big boy, whose contralto was famous. At that distance, and in the dark, it was so easy to deceive yourself and think there was only one person singing. There was nothing talked about next morning but this wonderful incident, and both the people who had been there and the people who had not been there (who were piqued, and felt themselves neglected, as a matter of course) discussed it with the utmost excitement. Even before the hour of matins, old Pick, who was out upon his master's business and Mrs. Purcell's errands, was twice interviewed on the subject. The first time it was Rowley, the tenor, who assailed him, whose boy was the first soprano, and whose rights were attacked. 'I should just like to know what the Signor is up to,' Rowley said. 'He's always got some new fad or other in his head. He'll have us all up next into that organ-

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loft, like a set of Christy Minstrels. Hanged if I'll go!'

'Anyhow, you'll wait till you're asked,' said old Pick.

'I don't advise him to ask *me*. And, look here! I want to know who it was. If he's bringing in somebody in the dark, on the sly, to put them boys' noses out!—you never can tell what a foreign fellow's up to. I don't know a voice like that, not in the Abbey. If he's smuggling in a new boy, without no warning, to take the bread out of folks' mouths, by George, I won't stand it! I'll go to the Dean about it! Tommy's cried hisself hoarse. He couldn't eat his breakfast, poor little beggar! and he's got "Hear my prayer" this morning. Hanged if I don't think it's all a scheme against me and my boy! That ain't a child's voice. There's a touch of falsetto in it, if I know anything about music. It won't last, not a month. I've heard them come out like that, that you could hear them a mile off, just before they break.'

'Then you were there, Mr. Rowley?' said old Pick; 'I thought there was only the folks from the Deanery there.'

'I wasn't there. Catch me in the Abbey when I'm not wanted! I have enough of it, practising and bothering from morning till

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night. The Signor's very good for the organ. I don't say nothing against that; but he don't know much about Englishmen. You do no justice to your voice when you never give yourself no rest; but he can't understand that. I heard it outside. Pick, there's a good old fellow, you know what it is yourself, and I'm sure we're always glad to see you when you look in at our little place. Tell us what's up—who is it? Tommy will have to go in time. I don't say nothing against that. But he's not twelve, poor little beggar, and his voice is as clear as a bell. He's fit to fret himself into a fever if they take the first solos from him. Tell us what the Signor's up to, and who he's got coming in? I say it's a shame,' said the tenor, rising again into vehemence. 'Them that is on the spot, and belonging to the place, and bred up in the Abbey all their lives, hanged if they should be turned out for strangers! I don't see the fun of that.'

'If you've done, Mr. Rowley, I think I'll go,' said Pick; upon which Rowley swore under his breath that it wasn't like an old friend to give a fellow no answer, and that he didn't know what he and Tommy had done to offend the Signor. To this old Pick made no reply, being himself extremely indignant not to know anything about the mystery in question. He

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had heard of no new boy—'nor anything as is new,' Pick said to himself with warmth as he hurried through the enclosure which belonged to the lay clerks, where a great many people were at the doors and windows, and the excitement was general. It was natural that Pick should be indignant. So little as there ever was to hear or report within the Precincts, to think something should have happened under his very nose, in the Abbey, and he not know! The Signor was a good master, and the place was comfortable; but there are things which no man can be expected to stand. Even Mr. John had not said a word about any novelty. If he had told his mother, then the housekeeper had been as treacherous as the rest, and had not breathed a word to Pick. It was a thing that no man could be expected to put up with. Here were two ladies now bearing down upon him, full of curiosity—and that Pick should have to confess that he did'nt know!

'Oh, Pickering! you must know—who was it that was singing in the Abbey last night? A very extraordinary thing for the Signor to countenance. He did not ask *us*; he knew it would be of no use, for neither my husband nor I approve of such proceedings; making the Abbey, our beautiful Abbey, into a kind of music-hall! I hear it was a lady: the very

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worst taste, and anything *so* unecclesiastical! Women don't *exist* in the Church—not as taking any part—but these are points which foreigners never will understand,' said the lady, with a sigh.

'It was odd having such a performance at all, for a few privileged persons. I thought the Abbey, at least,' said the second lady, 'was for all.'

'Don't go, Pickering; you haven't answered my question. If I were you, being a man of experience, and having known the Abbey so long as you have done, I would give a hint to your master. You should tell him people here don't like that sort of thing. It may do very well abroad, or even in town, where there are all sorts; but it does not do in St. Michael's. You should tell him, especially as he is only half English, to be more careful. Stop a little, Pickering! You have not answered my question yet.'

'Beg your pardon, ma'am, but you didn't give me no time,' said Pick.

'Do not be impertinent, Pickering. I asked you a plain question, and I told you what I should do in your place. A man like you, that has been so long about the Abbey, might be of great use to your master. You should tell him that in England a lady is never suffered to open

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her mouth in church. I never heard of anything so unecclesiastical. I wonder the Dean does not interfere—a man of good Church principles as he is, and with so much at stake. I really wonder the Dean does not interfere.'

'Oh, the Dean!' said the other lady; 'and as for Church principles——'

But just then there was a tremble in the air with the first movement of the matin bells, and, without compromising his dignity or showing his ignorance, old Pick made good his escape. He went home in anything but an amiable state of mind, and went straight to the kitchen, where Mrs. Purcell was busy, as was natural at this time of the day, putting all in order and arranging for the Signor's dinner. The luncheon Mary Anne was quite equal to, but some one was coming to dinner, for whom Mrs. Purcell intended to exercise all her powers. Pick went in with a fierce glow of indignant animation, with his roll of commissions fulfilled and unfulfilled.

'There's no sweetbreads to be had,' he said, 'till Saturday; they'll save you a pair on Saturday, if you send the order with the man when he comes; but they'll be six-and-six, if you think that too dear. (Dear! I should think it was dear. How much o' that goes to the veal, I wonder, and the man as fed it?) And as for

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game! you might as well go a-shooting on the Slopes; and what there is bringing its weight in gold. I wouldn't give in, if I was you, to that fashion about grouse. It's all a fashion. Nobody ever thought of grouse in my young days, and coming after they've eat everything as they can set their face to. What should they want with it? I've brought you the lemons. Many a man wouldn't be seen carrying a bag o' lemons all the way up the hill; and everything's kep' from me, just because I'm too humble-minded, and don't make no stand, nor mind what I do.'

'What's been kep' from you, Pick?' said Mrs. Purcell, pausing in her work to look at him. Then she added, 'There's been a deal of talking in the study. I've picked up a word or two about some woman, for they were going on about She; and She—but whether it's that Miss Despard, or who it is, John's never said a word to me.'

'It don't need a witch to tell that it's a woman,' said Pick; but he was relieved. 'That fellow Rowley's been at me, and one of the ladies round the corner; but they both had so much to say that I got off, and neither the one nor the other found out as I hadn't a notion what they were talking about,' the old man added, with a chuckle. 'It's some new voice, as far as I can make out, as master has got hold of

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for the Abbey: and quite right too. Tommy Rowley's got a pretty little bit of a voice, and he's only twelve; but some voices goes sooner than others. The ladies thought as it was a woman; but that's impossible. They were quite in a way. They said it was uneck—some thin' or other—Dissenting-like, as I took it up—and that the Signor ought to be ashamed of hisself——'

'Master?' said Mrs. Purcell, opening her eyes wide; 'but I hope you didn't stand there and hear them say any harm of the Signor?'

'They told me as I was to give him good advice,' said Pick, still chuckling; 'but all the same, ma'am, I don't think as Mr. John should keep a thing from his mother. Where's the young man as owes as much to his mother as that young man owes to you?'

'Not to me, to his own deservings; he's been a lad that has done credit to everyone as has been kind to him, Pick, and never forgets nobody as has been kind to him; but he's not the young man he was. He's lost all his smiles and his fun since he had that disappointment. I don't wish Miss Despard no harm, but I wish she had been a hundred miles from here, and my John had never seen her. Young women have a great deal to answer for,' said Mrs. Purcell, with a sigh.

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'Young women haven't much to answer for, so far as I'm concerned; nor master neither, so far as I can see,' said Pick, going off to his work with a comfortable consciousness that, this being the case, it did not matter so much about Mr. John.

But, if the community was thus stirred in general, words cannot tell the excitement that this strange incident created in the organ-loft. The Signor told Purcell after, that he could not tell what it was that made him go on when he had come to an end of the 'Pastoral Symphony,' and play 'There were Shepherds.' He had not meant to do it. He had intended to make the other the finale of his performance. There was such a feeling of night in it, the Signor said, the grass growing in the dark, and the stars shining, and the dew coming down. He meant to end there; he knew Mr. Ridsdale was a modern man and an opera man, and did not care so very much for Handel. Still he had meant to end with that; but when it came to the last chords he was not his own master, and he went on. As for Purcell, there was no need for anyone to tell him whose that voice was. Though he was at the moment helping to 'blow,' he nearly compromised the whole performance by darting to the other side of the organ-loft and gazing down into the darkness to see her. Happily

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the other man who was there, the professional blower, was taken by no such vagaries and kept on steadily. 'And I saw her,' Purcell said, 'standing in the moonlight with all the colours of the rainbow about her, like the nimbus round the heads in Mr. Clayton's new window.' The young fellow was quite struck by this sight. He thought it must mean something: he thought even she must be relenting towards himself, and had taken this strange way of showing it. The Signor was greatly moved too, but he did not take that view of the subject. He was a true artist himself, and he knew that there are impulses which get the better of people who are of this race. He patted his assistant on the arm, and told him not to build on it. But what then could it mean? young Purcell said; and it was difficult to answer. They both of them came down from their lofty gallery afterwards in great excitement, and the Signor, confused, received the enthusiastic thanks of his audience. 'What a pleasure you have given us!' they said; 'you have been better than your word. What exquisite playing, and what an exquisite voice! You don't mean to say that was a boy, Signor?' —They asked the question, but they all believed, of course, that it was a boy. To think that little Rowley, because it was dark and nobody saw him, should have been able to sing like that!

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No one suspected the truth except Rollo Ridsdale, who came up to the musician in the dark nave and gripped him by the arm, so that he hurt the sensitive Italian-Englishman, whose nerves were all on the surface. 'Did you do it on purpose?' Rollo cried, excited too—'I shall give up the opera and take to oratorios--did you do it on purpose?' 'Did *you* do it on purpose?' said the Signor, who up to this moment had supposed in his excitement that Ridsdale's coming must have had something to do with it. But after that question, which Rollo did not distinctly hear, the Signor changed his tone and hid his own astonishment, and accepted the applauses addressed to him on the admirable device by which he had given his hearers a double pleasure. And Purcell and he went home with their heads full of a hundred conjectures. Who had brought her in? how did she know of it even? Old Wykeham had kept his own counsel—he did not know whether he might not be supposed to have taken too much upon him had it been known; and, though he heard the two musicians talking of this miracle, he threw no light upon it, which he might have done so easily. Who could have told her? who could have brought her in? Purcell could not but think that her coming was a sign of relenting, that she was thus making a kind of celestial

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intimation that all was not over. This raised him into a very ecstasy of hope.

The Signor had other thoughts. He thought of nothing else all night; the sympathy and comprehension of an artist filling his mind and driving away the almost dislike with which, after her rejection of his *protégé*, he had been disposed to regard Lottie. Whatever might happen to Purcell, here was something which had never happened to himself in his life before. No doubt it had been a sudden impulse, like that which had made her fly trembling and pale with excitement, from himself and them all, in the drawing-room of the Deanery. This time the impulse had been the other way, and she had obeyed it. He had subjugated her by waiting her time, and, by what was much more pleasant to think of, the spell of his music, which had gone to her heart. Let it not be supposed that any sentiment about Lottie had begun to creep into the Signor's heart. Young women, as Pick said, had little to answer for as far as he was concerned. He was all artist and not much else; but, with a glow through his being which answered, let us suppose, to the high throb of satisfaction which goes through persons who talk about their hearts, he said to himself, 'She shall not escape me this time!' He knew more of Lottie than Rollo Ridsdale

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did. And he knew that he could make more of her than Rollo could make of her. He could make of her much more than was dreamed of in Rollo's philosophy. He knew what she needed, and he could give it to her. In his hands, the Signor thought, this simple English girl might rise to the level of the Malibrans, of the Pastas. There should be no one able to stand before her.

It is to be feared he was thinking of this more than of the music as he played through King in F, which was the service for that morning. And he left Purcell to play the voluntary and stole out unobserved, though it was indecorous, before the congregation had dispersed. He threaded through the dim aisles and the cloisters, before Wykeham had time to call attention to him by hobbling after him with his jangling keys. He, like Lottie, had resolved to give himself no time to think of it, to do it at once. Ridsdale!—What a vain fool he was, talking about giving up opera and taking to oratorios! What could he do with her, if he had got her? His manager had rejected Lottie, and gone off after that voice at Milan. What fools they all were! and what would be the advantage to Ridsdale of having this voice untrained on his hands? What could he do with her? but there was

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nothing she might not do under the guidance of the Signor.

It was still early when he reached the little house: Lottie had not attempted to go out this morning to see the Signor, she was too much shaken by her escapade of last night. How could she have done it? She, who had loathed the idea of becoming a singer! She had made a singer of herself by her own act and deed, and she felt the full meaning of what she had done. She had got up early, unable in her excitement to sleep, and tingling still with the consequences of this strange, unpremeditated, unintended self-betrayal. What was it that had made her do it? She had got her work, and she had placed herself near the window—not so near as to be seen, yet near enough to be able to glance out and see anyone who might be coming that way. There were things to be done in the house, domestic operations of more importance than the needlework. But Lottie said to herself that they could wait—oh, they could wait! In the meantime what was best was, that she should be ready in case anyone called, ready to see anybody that might come over the road across the sunshine, in the morning quiet. 'Good night; but only till to-morrow'—what was it that had conveyed to her the consciousness that he was there? The Abbey had been

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dark—she had not been thinking of him—certainly she had not known that he was looked for; and yet, what but the sense that he was there would have made her do what she had done? She had sung unwillingly, unwittingly, in spite of herself, because he was there. It all seemed quite plain to Lottie. He it was (she thought) who had first made her aware that this gift of hers was anything worth thinking of; he it was who had first given her the supreme pleasure of consciousness, who had shown to her the happiness she could bestow. Her voice (as she thought), if after all it was really worth anything, if it was the thing he thought it, the thing it sounded like last night—belonged to him. It was his spiritually; he had discovered it, and revealed it to herself. She had not been aware what she was doing; but unconsciously it was to him she was singing, when her voice escaped from her: it was a welcome to him—and he had accepted it as his welcome. Lottie gave a glance from her window, and thought she saw some one coming across the broad sunshine in the Dean's Walk. Her heart gave a louder beat—*he* was coming. She made no mystery now about it; the preliminaries were all over. He came for her—who else? he had never concealed it; he had come for her long ago. She could not tell how long ago it was

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since he had first caught a glimpse of her at the window. Always since then it had been for her that he came: content at first to watch outside her window; then, with a lover's ingenuity, finding out ways of meeting her; then venturing, bold yet timid, always reverential, to her home—and now at length what was coming? He was coming. And she had withdrawn the veil from her heart, and seen and acknowledged what was there. It was for him she sang: without knowing it, her heart had been aware of his presence; and now he was coming. Lottie drew back in the shade of the great leaves which garlanded her window. The next moment he would be here——

But it was only the Signor.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FOOL'S PARADISE.

THE Signor came in with some suppressed excitement about him, which he concealed under an air of perfect calm, but which betrayed itself in the gleam of his eyes and the rapidity of his movements. He saw in a moment that he had bitterly disappointed Lottie, whose countenance changed as she saw him—changed from glowing expectation to that sudden pallor and sickness of departing hope which seems to carry all the life out of a face. He saw it, and he understood; he had the quickness of perception which belonged to his Italian origin, and he had, as we have said, a great deal that was feminine in him—this among the rest, that he could divine and read the meanings of a face. He saw at once what it was. She had expected, not him, but another. The Signor was very sorry for Lottie. He had been angry, almost spitefully angry, about her rejection of his favourite pupil; but she had made her peace with him last night, and all her

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offences had been condoned. He was very sorry for her. She had been looking for Ridsdale, and Ridsdale had not come. The Signor felt that he himself was a much safer and better visitor for her; but, all the same, he was sorry for Lottie. He bowed with a depth of respect, which, indeed, he showed to all ladies. He was more of an Italian than an Englishman in this point; he was always ceremonious and stately to women, bowing to the ground, taking the hand offered to him reverentially, as if he meant to kiss it. This ceremony gave Lottie a little time to recover herself, and after all it was very early. The voluntary was still sounding from the Abbey (how had the Signor got away so soon?), and though *he* had not appeared yet, that was not to say that he was not coming. She took her seat again, with the colour coming back.

'I do not know how to speak to you,' he said; 'how to thank you for last night——'

'Oh! so long as you do not think me very presumptuous—very bold. I—could not help it. It was the music that went to my head,' said Lottie, very tremulous, giving a hasty glance at him and then turning her head away.

'It is just because the music goes to your head that I have such high hopes—Miss Despard,' said the Signor; 'let bygones be bygones, won't you? and let us be friends.'

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'We never quarrelled that I know of,' said Lottie, slightly alarmed; and, for his part, the Signor was confused, thinking of Purcell, of whose misadventure he had, of course, no right to know.

'You were not pleased with me,' he said. 'I did not worship your voice as some people do. I told you plainly that you wanted instruction. So you do still. Your voice is lovely, Miss Despard, and you have the soul of an artist. You can forget yourself. Little singers never forget themselves; they are always in the foreground, seeing their own personality everywhere; but it is very different with you.'

Lottie did not say anything in reply. She felt vaguely that he was giving her praise, but she did not mind. Was that someone coming in below? but it was only Captain Despard returning in after matins. The Signor, always so quick, felt again the flutter in her, and knew what her expectation was.

'You were once very angry with me for making a—an application to you. You thought I meant to be disrespectful? Ah, no. I could not fail of respect to a lady, Miss Despard; but I saw in you what I see still more clearly now.'

'Signor!' said Lottie, rousing herself up to seize the opportunity, with a bewildered feeling

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that it was right to do it, that if she did not do it now, she never might; and, finally, that to do it might propitiate fate and make it unnecessary to be done—'Signor—let me tell you first. I went to the Abbey yesterday on purpose to see you, to say to you——ah, here is some one coming to interrupt us.'

'Yes, there is some one coming to interrupt us,' cried the Signor almost bitterly; this time there could be no doubt who it was; 'but first, one word before he comes. You were coming to tell me that you consented—that you would be my pupil?'

She could scarcely pay any attention to him, he saw. What a thing to think of, that a girl like this, a woman with genius, should let an empty-headed coxcomb come between her and all that was worth caring for, between her and Art! She gave him a confused, half-guilty look, which seemed like a confession of weakness, and nodded only in reply. Nodded! when a proposal was made to her such as the Muse might have made to her chief favourite, when the gates of the Palace of Art were being rolled open wide to admit her. In that moment, Lottie, all pre-occupied by the advent of a mere man of fashion, in music not more than a charlatan, in honour not much to brag of, gave her consent to the arrangement which was to

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fashion her life by—a nod. Heaven and earth! what a demonstration of female folly! Could the Signor be anything but vexed? He could hardly restrain his impatience, as Rollo came in, all eager and smiling, easy and cordial even to himself. The Signor, though he was as innocent of sentiment as old Pick, looked like nothing in the world so much as a scared, jealous, and despairing lover, watching, in spite of himself, the entrance of the conquering hero, for whom all the songs were sung and all the welcomes said.

'I might have known I should find Rossinetti here,' said Rollo, 'as he is an earlier bird than I am. Where could we all flock this morning but here? You have been thanking Miss Despard for her divine singing last night. My life, what singing it was! I have never heard anything like it. Miss Despard, I have come to announce to you my conversion. I abjure opera as I abjure the pope. Henceforward Handel is my creed—so long as you are his interpreter,' he added, sinking his voice.

'Yes,' said the Signor. 'Miss Despard will sing very well if she works; but we are far yet from the highest excellence of which such a voice as hers is capable. I will take my leave now. Perhaps you have a friend who would bring you to my house? that would be the best.

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No doubt I could come here; but if you will come to my house, my piano is a very good one, and that would be the best. Don't think it is anything to be remarked; my pupils constantly do it. They bring a maid with them, or, if it is needful, I send for Mrs. ——, for my housekeeper. My young ladies are most unflatteringly at their ease with me.'

'You are going to take lessons?' Rollo asked quickly. 'I congratulate you, Rossinetti. My good fellow, you are a great genius, and I know very little, but I never was so envious of you before. All the same you know lessons are—teaching is—well, we must admit, not much more than a pretence in the present case. The habit of singing, that is all Miss Despard wants.'

'You must pardon me that I don't agree with you,' the Signor said, somewhat stiffly. 'Miss Despard does not want flattery from me. She will get plenty of that by and by; but she does want teaching, *senza complimenti*, and that she shall have if she will take it. It rests with her whether or not she will take it. If she does take it as I would have her do—then,' said the Signor, with a gleam in his eyes of suppressed enthusiasm, 'then I flatter myself——'

Rollo was provoked. Though he was very

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sweet-tempered, he did not like to be crowed over in this way, and his pleasant hyperbole flattened out; besides, there is something in the presence of a young woman which makes men, ever so slightly pitted against each other, pugnacious. He laughed. 'I see,' he said, 'you won't flatter Miss Despard, Rossinetti, but you flatter yourself.'

'I will send you word about hours,' said the Signor hastily. 'I beg your pardon, I did not quite catch your last observation. Good morning, Miss Despard. To-morrow or after to-morrow I shall hope to begin.'

'Good-bye, for the moment; we shall meet later,' said Rollo, with a smile and a nod, turning to open the door for his—not rival certainly, but competitor. He opened the door and closed it behind the Signor with quite unnecessary attention, his face full of suppressed laughter and malicious satisfaction. Rollo felt that he remained master of the field. He came back to where Lottie, agitated and happy, was sitting, rubbing his hands with triumph. 'The Signor is an excellent musician, but he is a prig, Miss Despard, if you will permit the word; and now that we have got rid of him,' said Rollo, dropping into that other seat beside her, 'let me say——'

What did he say? Lottie remembered

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most of the words for years and years. When she heard the sound of them again in other conversations, in sentences that had no relation to her, from other people, and even addressed to other people, she would hold her breath. Foolish girl! they were well-worn words, such as perhaps every woman possessing such a gift, or even a much smaller gift than Lottie's, has heard to weariness; but the most common approbation, which afterwards becomes the mere accompaniment and petty murmur of existence, one time in one's life is divine—as he told her her voice was, as he let her infer she too was, and everything about her. Lottie was not used to anything like flattery. Even in the best of circumstances, fathers and brothers are seldom enthusiastic; and kind Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, though she had given her countenance to Rowley's lessons, did not in the least conceal that she was bored by them; and the tenor was a great deal too much occupied with his own voice, and the compliments that had been paid to him, to leave him much time for complimenting his pupil. It was true that the Signor's wish to teach her was of itself the essence of flattery; but he never had given her any credit for her singing, and always had seen the faults of it. So that it was Rollo who had first revealed to her that heaven of praise which is so doubly

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sweet to the neophyte when it is supposed to be not her excellence, but his love, which inspires it. Lottie had no defence against the enthusiasm, the admiration, the rhapsodies of her companion. If they were excessive, that was not because he was failing in truth, but only abounding in love. So she thought. The very atmosphere around her turned into happiness. Her eyes were dazzled with it. She could not look at him nor lift her face except in momentary sudden glances, so much was the air full of this suffused, subdued, but penetrating glory. And, strangely enough, though he did not feel half so much as she supposed him to feel, Rollo himself was moved by this something in the air which rayed out from her exquisite dawn of bliss and of love. He said naturally a great deal more than he intended—and, what was more wonderful, he felt a great deal more than he could have supposed possible—and without the least purpose or thought, dropped moment by moment deeper and deeper into that curious kind of rapture which is tolerably well expressed by the phrase, falling in love. Reason had nothing to do with it, nor intention; and he had not come here driven by a passion which was more strong than he was, as Lottie thought. But, nevertheless, whether it was the magnetic influence of that sentiment in her which he had

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called forth without knowing it, and which now touched him with sympathetic life: or the more commonplace result of her beauty, and of their close propinquity, and her loneliness, and the generous impulse of protection and kindness that was in him: certain it is that all Lottie's ideas of him realised themselves in the young man's mind in the most miraculous way. He had always been, all his friends knew, ridiculously sympathetic all his life. Never before had it taken this precise form; but then, never before had Rollo met with the same combination of circumstances. He had flirted with a great many people, and foolish girls, who were not prudent enough to remember his younger brotherhood and impecunious position, had liked his company and been very willing to roam along the first beginnings of the primrose path by his side; but nothing more than the lightest exchanges of sentiment had ever come to pass. And then he had believed of several women that they were 'making a set' at him, and desiring to 'catch' him. No degree of younger brotherhood, no amount of impecuniosity, will prevent a man from thinking that some woman or other is trying to 'catch' him; but never in all his life had Rollo come across a creature like Lottie, simply, solemnly, gratefully convinced that he was in love with her. Lottie

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had not been in love with him when she thought she found this out. But her certainty as to *his* sentiments had been absolute. And now this certainty was realising itself. It was a very different thing from the love which points directly and, as a matter of course, to the natural conclusion. He thought of nothing of the kind. He did not choose her out of all the world, as Lottie thought. But it came to very much the same thing as they sat together, talking about everything, dropping into mutual confidences, wasting the sweet autumnal morning. Lottie knew that all her domestic businesses were waiting for her, but did not care. And Rollo knew that, if he were questioned as to where he had been, he would have to invent an explanation other than the true one. But what did this matter? They sat and talked, forgetting even music, which was the one thing hitherto which had occupied them when together. He did not ask her to sing to him, which was a thing which made Lottie very happy, notwithstanding that it was his admiration of her voice only which had made her recognise and be glad of that possession. She had sung for him gladly, but now she was more pleased not to be asked to sing. What did they want with music? It would be hard to describe how well they came to know each other during that

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long morning's talk. He told her about himself, and she told him about herself, and thus they skimmed over very dangerous ground as to the beginning of their own acquaintance. Lottie, with a girl's shrinking from premature avowal, hurried over that point lest he might perhaps tell her how he had seen her, and dreamed of her, long before he dared claim acquaintance. Poor Lottie! but for that fond delusion she might have heard the real cause of his first eagerness to make her acquaintance, and been disenchanted. But what would it have mattered? By this time, things had gone too far to make it an advantage to her now to be undeceived.

This was the beginning of the time which was the crown and flower of life to Lottie Despard. Deceived, and yet not deceived; creating really the sentiment which she believed in, yet not as she believed it: she herself all simple and trustful, impassioned in everything she undertook, then and there, to the last fibre of her being, gave her heart to Rollo Ridsdale —loved him, believing herself as fully justified as ever woman was, by the possession of his love, to bestow her own; and bestowing it purely, freely, without doubt or *arrière pensée.* His rank and the pleasure of thinking that some one out of the world above her, the world

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which she aspired to, and felt herself to belong to, was seeking her, had dazzled Lottie at the first;—but by this time it did not matter to her who or what Rollo was. Sometimes even, she thought that she would prefer him to be more on her own level: then stopped and reproved herself proudly for wanting to take anything from him who deserved everything. His position as a patrician, his supposed wealth (how was Lottie to know that such a man, possessing everything, could be just as poor, and perhaps not much more honourable in respect to debt and such matters, than her father?), the grace and nobleness of all his surroundings, were part of his nature, she thought in her simplicity. To shut him up in small rooms, confine him to the limited horizon of common life, and its poor little routine of duties, would be to take something from Rollo; and she did not want to take anything from him, rather to add any honour and glory that might be wanting. She did not know how long or how short a time they had been together on that wonderful morning before they first began to talk (as Lottie said) like friends. It lasted no more than a moment, and yet it was a new life all luminous and great, throwing the twenty years of the other life which had preceded it, entirely into shade. She had to stand still to

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steady herself and accustom her eyes to the ordinary atmosphere when he went away. Everything was changed. Her head went round. She did not know how to go downstairs (too late, much too late!) and look after the household matters which she had postponed; and when she did go to them, went hazily like one in a dream. What a change had come upon life! Yesterday, even Rollo was no more than a distant vision of possibilities to her; now she seemed to know him thoroughly, to know all about him; to feel that she could tell him whatever might happen, that it would be natural to confide everything to him—everything! her heart threw wide open its doors. She did not think even that he might wonder to find himself so entirely received into her life. Lottie had none of the experience which the most ordinary encounter with the world, which even ball-room tattle and the foolish commerce of flirtations give. She came to this first chapter, all innocent and original in heart and thought, with the frankness as well as the timidity of a nature unalarmed and (in this kind) knowing no evil. Love was to her an angel, the first of the angels—inspiring awe, but no terror. She went to her work feeling as if she walked to some noble strain of music. Nothing could irritate her, nothing put her out.

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That evening Lottie went out upon the Slopes in the dusk to breathe the evening air and give herself that fresher, sweeter medium for her dreams. Law was out, the Captain was out as usual; and the little house was very still with only Mary in the kitchen (for most of her time hanging about the back entrance looking for the baker), and Lottie upstairs. Somehow to-night Lottie did not wait for Captain Temple, who had constituted himself her escort, but as soon as it began to be really evening stole out by herself and made her way quickly up the Dean's Walk, not anxious to join anyone. She wanted to be alone for her thoughts. It was not that the slightest idea of meeting Rollo entered into her mind—how should it? The dinners at the Deanery were not like the afternoon meal in the Chevaliers' lodges, out of which all the inhabitants streamed as soon as that was over, to get the good of the summer night. Summer—for, though it was beginning to be autumn, it was still summer—warm, soft, delicious evenings with so much dusk in them, and misty sweetness. Lottie wanted nothing at that moment of dreamy happiness but silence and her own thoughts; more, however, was in store for her. The Deanery dinner was a family dinner that evening, and while the Dean read the evening paper, and Lady Caroline put up

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her feet on the sofa, what was a young man to do? He said he would go over to the Signor's and talk music and smoke a cigar; and the elder people, though they were fond of Rollo, were not sorry to be rid of him. He wanted, perhaps, to enjoy his triumph over the Signor, or to find out what his plans were and expectations of Lottie's voice; or, perhaps, only he wanted a little variety, feeling the company of his venerated relations too much pleasure. But, though he was not so full of dreams as Lottie, something of the same charmed mood was in his mind. And when caprice made him take the turn up to the Slopes also, instead of going the other way through the Cloisters to the musician's house—and when the two caught sight of each other, they both started with genuine surprise, and there was on Lottie's side even a little alarm. She was too shy to beg him in so many words to go away, but it was only the want of courage which kept her from saying so. It was too much; it did not seem right to meet him again; but then Lottie reflected that to the merest acquaintance she was bound to be polite. Mr. Ridsdale had the same thought. He was unfeignedly delighted to see her, finding this way of escape from all possibility of dulness much more complete than he thought; but yet he felt that perhaps a second encounter so soon, and in a place

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open to all eyes, might be dangerous; notwithstanding, what could a man do? He was bound to be civil. He could not run away from a lady when he met her, simply because he admired her—a reason, on the contrary, to keep him by her side. So they took a stroll together, this way and that way, from one end to the other: it was not a very long way. He told her that he was going to the Signor's, and she accepted the explanation very demurely, notwithstanding the fact that the Signor lived on the lower side of the Deanery and this was on the upper side; and she told him that she had only just come out, having missed Captain Temple, who would appear presently:—'He is my usual companion—he is very old, the oldest of all the Chevaliers—and he is very, very kind to me.' Each accepted what the other thus said with a kind of solemnity; and they made two turns up and down, stopping now and then to look out upon the plain so broad and blue, with the soft autumn mists hanging on the horizon. 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,' Rollo said; and they stood still and gazed, following the river in its silvery windings, and silent as if their minds were absorbed in these atmospheric influences and that dusky bridal of the earth and sky. When Captain Temple came up Rollo asked to be introduced to him, and was very civil.

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'Miss Despard has been waiting for you, and I have kept her company,' he said, so that the old Captain thanked him civilly, if a little stiffly; and then the two turned their backs upon each other, Rollo hastening down to the Cloisters to keep, as he said, his appointment, and Lottie turning away without so much as a parting glance, without shaking hands. Captain Temple, alarmed at first, took heart, and thought it was nothing but politeness when he saw how they parted. 'You were quite right, my dear, quite right to wait, and I am much obliged to Mr. Ridsdale; I cannot think how I missed you.' Lottie did not make a direct reply, but compelled herself to talk, and very demurely, with much praise of the lovely night, went with him home.

If Captain Temple had but known! And after this how many meetings there were, so happily accidental, so easily explainable, and yet requiring no such explanation! How well they began to know each other's habits and each other's likings; and how sweet were all the dewy misty paths in that fool's paradise! or on the Slopes, if you prefer it; it does not matter much about a name.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

A TERRIBLE INTERRUPTION.

WHILE the time went on in this dream for Lottie it did not stand still with the rest of the world. Her absorption in her own affairs, which for the moment had become complete, and withdrew her thoughts from much that had previously occupied them, was very agreeable to her father and brother. Lottie had exercised no control that she was aware of upon her father; but now that her keen eyes were veiled with dreams, and her mind abstracted from what was going on round her, it is inconceivable how much more free and at his ease the Captain felt. He had a jauntier air than ever, when he walked down into the town after he was released from matins; and he came in later at night. Captain Despard's doings at this time were much talked of in the lodges. He had never been approved by his brother Chevaliers. The old gentlemen felt that this younger man, with his jauntiness and his love of pleasure, was no credit to them; and if the gossip was true about

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his intentions, some of them thought that something ought to be done. The ladies were still more indignant. They were threatened in their dignity more than their husbands were. An officer was an officer, whatever happened; but if this man, who was in himself so objectionable, should bring in a dressmaker girl among them, it was the Chevaliers' wives who would be the sufferers. The gentlemen thought vaguely that something should be done; but the ladies were for carrying it to Parliament, or to the Queen herself. Was there not some old statute forbidding a Chevalier to marry? If there was not, there ought to be, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said, with a twinkle in her eye. There was nobody, indeed, so much aggrieved as Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who lived next door, and was already intimate with the family; and though there were times when she made a joke of it, there were also times when she was ready to go to the Queen on the subject.

'If there isn't a law there ought to be one!' Mrs. O'Shaughnessy declared. 'What do they want with wives at their age, if they haven't got 'em already? D'ye think I'd like to hear of me Major with a second, and me not cold in my grave?'

It was suggested that the Chevaliers should 'speak to' this dangerous member of their

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corporation; but the old gentlemen, it was found, did not care to undertake this. Who would do it? There was not one of them who could use the privilege of friendship with this flighty, dissipated fellow, who was young at fifty to the other veterans; and they had not the same confidence in the efficacy of 'speaking to' a culprit which the ladies had.

So the little world within the Precincts looked on in great perturbation, sorry for Lottie, but still more sorry for themselves, whose credit was threatened by this danger. And jauntier and jauntier grew the Captain. He wore his hat more and more over his left ear—he got a new tie, louder and brighter than any that had ever been seen in the Precincts. His new suit was of a larger stripe. Altogether, things were ripening for some new event. Something was going to happen; everybody felt it, in the air, in the heaviness of the autumn weather. Lottie's proceedings, which might otherwise have given much anxiety to the community, were veiled by the interest attaching to her father's; which, indeed, was well for Lottie, who was not at all times quite aware what she was doing, or where her steps were tending, as she walked and wandered—not in her sleep, but in her dreams.

There was another who took advantage of

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Lottie's abstraction, and that was Law. He had begun by going quite regularly to Mr. Ashford, 'reading,' as it was called, with the Minor Canon, whom he liked, and who was kind to him, and sharing the instructions which were being given to young Uxbridge, the son of the Canon. For a little while there had been gloom and consternation in this young man's home because of Law. He was not a companion for her boy, Mrs. Uxbridge thought; but when this was suggested to the Minor Canon he smiled so grimly, and answered with such uncompromising brutality, that, of course, he could have no possible objections to young Mr. Uxbridge's removal, that the mother nearly fainted, and Mr. Uxbridge himself, a large and stately person, had to stammer forth an apology. There was a dangerous gleam in Ashford's eye, enough to appal the Chapter, notwithstanding his inferiority to them, and there was nothing for it but to let him have his way. And for a week or two Law was exemplary—he allowed that for the first time in his life he could feel he was getting on; he became what he called 'thick' with Uxbridge, who took him out boating and cricketing; and so far all went well. But when Lottie's vigilance all at once relaxed—when she began to steal out herself, and come in with her eyes all dazzled and

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dreamy, often not knowing when she was spoken to, taking so much less heed than usual of other people's proceedings, Law's industry began to flag. Sometimes he 'shirked' altogether; very often he never looked at his books, except under Mr. Ashford's eye. He made Uxbridge idle too, who was but too much disposed to take a bad example. Uxbridge had a boat of his own, and they went on the river for days together. Sometimes a cricket match ended in a dinner, to which Law would be invited with his friend. He got into better company, but it is doubtful whether this was much to the advantage of his morals, and it certainly was not at all to the advantage of his studies. The Minor Canon remonstrated, and Lottie would now and then wake up and make an appeal to him.

'Are you working, Law? I hope you are working. Does Mr. Ashford think you are getting on?' she would say. But these were not like the energetic protests of old. And when Law answered that he was getting on pretty well, but that old Ashford didn't say much—it wasn't his way—Lottie accepted the reply, and asked no more questions. And Law accordingly took 'his fling,' being left free on all sides. Why shouldn't he take his fling? The others were doing it—even Lottie; did she

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think he was blind not to see how often that fellow Ridsdale was spooning about, and how many more walks she took than she used to? Captain Temple got tired of coming for her. Very often she had gone before he came—and would run back breathless, and so sorry to have missed him. What did all that mean if not that Lottie was taking her fling too? And his father—Captain Despard—was speeding very quickly towards such a thing as would startle the whole town, not to speak of the Abbey. It would be hard if Law were the only one to have his nose kept to the grindstone; and this, we may be sure, was the last thing he meant to allow.

As for Lottie, she carried on the business of her life in a way. The house did not suffer —the dinner was always punctual, and the stockings mended, notwithstanding dreams. She found time, indeed, for more actual occupation than before. She went to the Signor's—Mrs. O'Shaughnessy generally, but sometimes Captain Temple, going with her when she went for her lessons—and she went to the Abbey more frequently than she had been used to do. These lessons were moments of excitement for the Signor's household. When it was the old Captain who accompanied Miss Despard, Mrs. Purcell was had in from her

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room, where she sat expectant among her jam cupboards; and profound was her interest. She sat near the door hemming some dusters, while the lesson went on; but sometimes would drop her work and cross her hands, and raise her eyes to the dusky heaven of the ceiling.

'Dear, bless me!' said the housekeeper, 'that was a note!' for she had learned a little about music after all her experiences. Her son rarely made his appearance at all; he would loiter about the passage and catch a glimpse of Lottie as she went in or out, and sometimes he would come in suddenly very red and agitated, to turn over the music or look for some song that was wanted. Lottie was very anxious always to be friendly to him; but though these lessons seemed to poor young Purcell the things which chiefly made life desirable, yet he was not sufficiently at his ease to make any reply to her greeting, except by a deeper blush and an embarrassed bow. And very often—so often that the Signor had almost wound himself up to the point of remonstrating, and old Pick had been charged to say that his master was engaged, and that no one could enter—Rollo Ridsdale would stray in by accident and form one of the party. It was very strange that, though old Pick had orders so precise, yet Rollo somehow always got in. How was it?

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'I don't know myself,' old Pick would say, with a grin; 'he's the perseveringest gentleman I ever see—and awful fond of music. It must cost him a deal,' Pickering said.

Rollo strolled in sometimes at the beginning, before due precautions had been taken, sometimes near the end, when they were relaxed. He made himself very agreeable. As for Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, she was his slave, and she was quite persuaded by this time that she herself was nearly connected with the Courtland family, and that Rollo's uncle—or was it a cousin?—had been not only the Major's but her own dearest friend. Captain Temple, when he was the chaperon, was more suspicious; but, notwithstanding his objection to young men, and especially to Honourables, in connection with young women, Rollo ended by making the old Chevalier his friend. He had the gift of disarming prejudice—being kind himself by nature, and of a friendly disposition, such as makes friends. And Rollo was very careful under the eyes of all these keen observers. He confined himself to music. He looked unutterable things; but he did not speak the applause that was implied in his looks. He said only, 'I must not say anything, Miss Despard—I dare not, for Rossinetti; but I think the more.'

Lottie did not want him to applaud her. It

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was enough for her that he heard her; but it was only when he was there that she did herself full justice. And it is not to be supposed that the Signor was ignorant of the changed tone in her voice which showed when he appeared. It was too great a vexation to him to be ignored. Art, pure art, was not as yet, if it ever would be, the spring of Lottie's life. It was 'that fellow.' Her voice grew softer and more exquisite, full of pathos and meaning—her notes more liquid and sweet. If the Signor had been Rollo's rival in reality he could scarcely have been more annoyed—he whose aspiration was to make a true artist of this creature, to whom heaven had given so glorious a medium of expression, but who as yet knew nothing about art.

Thus September stole away. Never before had Ridsdale been so long at the Deanery. He gave sometimes one reason and sometimes another for his delay. It was very convenient for him, as the place was central, and he was often obliged to run up to town to see after business connected with the Opera. His company meant to open their house in spring; and the manager being in Italy, there was a great deal to do which fell upon Rollo. He had invitations without number, but he neglected them all. So long as his aunt would have him there was no place so convenient for him as the

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Deanery. And Lady Caroline was very willing to have him. She had always been kind to him. If her feelings had been strong enough to justify anyone in considering himself her favourite, then Rollo might have done so. She had always been kind; and a habit of kindness is as good as any other habit, and is the best pledge of continuance. And she liked in a way to have him there. He never gave her any trouble—now and then he succeeded in something that was very like amusing her. And he no longer demanded of her that she should invite Miss Despard daily, or trouble herself with the other people who sang. Two or three times only during the month did he ask for an invitation for the girl in whose voice he was so much interested. And he was very domestic—triumphantly disproving all the stories that had been told of him. He never cared to dine anywhere but at home while he was at the Deanery—he did not care for company. He was a very nice companion for the Dean at dinner, and after dinner he would stroll out and smoke a cigar. If he gave trouble at Courtland it was only, Lady Caroline thought with gentle complacency, because they did not know how to manage him; for anyone more happy to be quiet she never saw. And thus September passed; the partridges did not tempt him away,

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any more than the grouse had done. He did not care, he declared, about sport of any kind. Music and books, and his stroll of an evening on the Slopes to smoke his cigar—these were all the virtuous amusements Rollo desired—with these he was as happy as the day was long. And in October, Augusta, coming home from her bridal tour, was to visit her mother, and there would be a little society once more at the Deanery. It came to be understood that Rollo would stay for this. It would be something to make amends to him for the quiet of the past.

October began: it was a beautiful autumn; the trees on the Slopes were all red and yellow, like painted trees, and the face of the country brilliant with sunshine. Everything was smooth and fair without and within, so far as appearances went; and, had there been no results to follow, little exception could have been taken to the proceedings of the persons concerned in this history, who were each and all following their own pleasure and doing what seemed good in their own eyes. The Captain was perhaps the most safe and most virtuous of the whole, seeing that there was no reason why he should not marry Polly if he desired very much to do so, except that it would make his children uncomfortable and disturb the equanimity of his brother Chevaliers and their belongings. But he was

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in no way bound to consider the dignity of his brethren in the order, neither was he required by any law to sacrifice his own comfort for that of his son and daughter—both of them quite capable of taking thought for themselves. He may, therefore, be left out of the question; for, whether for good or evil, he was doing nothing more than he had a right to do. But in the case of the others: how pleasant would this episode of life have been had there been no consequences to follow! It was a most charming episode in the experience of Rollo Ridsdale. He was not a vicious man, but yet he had never been so virtuous, so free of evil, in all his consciousness before—his chief companion a perfectly pure-minded girl, his chief occupation to explore and study her fresh young heart and imagination, and vigorous intelligent nature. If only it could all go on to some as perfect conclusion, there could be no doubt that it was good for the speculative man of fashion. It restored him, body and soul,—regular hours, quiet, all the most luxurious comforts of life, and the delight and exhilaration of a romance to amuse the mental and sentimental side of him. The cleverest doctor that ever existed could not have recommended a more admirably curative process —if only there had been no responsibilities involved and nothing painful to follow. And

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Law—if Law had only had the prospect of a small estate, a small inheritance at the end, enough to live on, what a perfectly pleasant 'time' he was having! He was doing no harm, only boating, cricketing, beginning now as the season went on to think of football—none of them wicked pursuits: if only there had been no examinations to think of, no work of life to prepare for. Lottie was the least to blame of the three; the consequences did not trouble her. She might perhaps be allowing herself to be absorbed too much by the new and wonderful influence which had taken possession of her: the *vita nuova* might have become too entirely the law of her being; but well or ill she still did her duty, and her realisation of the result was perfectly simple. What but one thing could all this lead to? No doubt invaded Lottie's inexperienced mind; how could she doubt that Rollo loved her? What proof was wanting that man could give? They had not yet spoken of that love, though they had several times approached to the very verge of an explanation, from which generally it was she who shrank with a shy prolonging of that delicious uncertainty which was no uncertainty at all. How could Lottie have any doubt? It was not necessary even for her to say to herself that he was good and true. True!—she no more thought of false-

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hood than Eve had thought of the serpent before he hissed his first question into her ear. She did not understand what lying meant, practical lying of this kind. She let the sweet current sweep her on with many a heart-beat; but why should she be distrustful of it? What could love lead to but happiness? Lottie could not think of anything more.

And thus the time went on. Augusta Huntington (Mrs. Daventry) was coming home with her husband in a day or two; and though Lottie thought she would be glad to see her old friend, she had a little secret fear of anything now happening. All was very well as it was. To meet Rollo accidentally as he smoked his cigar on the Slopes would not be so easy if his cousin were at the Deanery. He would not be able to get out so easily, and probably she would find a great many new ways of employing him which would take him out of Lottie's way. She did not like to look forward to it; and after Augusta's visit Rollo too would go away. It would be almost winter, and he could not stop any longer. All the shooting and the deerstalking and the round of visits to great people, on which he ought to be going, he had given up for her. What could the reason be but for her? The thought that this moment of happiness was approaching an end,

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was sad to Lottie, even though it should, as was natural, be followed by greater happiness still. How her dull life had flowered and blossomed out, made beautiful by the thought that he was near her, this man who loved her—who had loved her long before she had loved him, but whom now she too—! He was near, she remembered every morning when she woke; some time in the day she would be sure to see him—nay, half a dozen times in the day, if only strolling down the Dean's Walk looking at her window, and in the Abbey, and perhaps, while she took her lesson, listening to her with soft eyes; perhaps walking home with her; perhaps just turning round that old elm-tree on the Slopes as she came out for her evening walk; always looking for her so eagerly, seeking her, with a hundred little tender cares, and something in his eyes which was more than all. Could it be possible to be happier than now? She was keeping off the *éclaircissement* with delicious shy malice, running away from it, prolonging a little longer, and a little longer, this happy uncertainty. Some time, however, it must come, and then no doubt she would be more happy—though not with such happiness as this.

On one of those lovely russet-coloured afternoons, full of haze made golden by the sunshine,

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already turning to the west, Lottie, walking up St. Michael's Hill, towards the Abbey, had seen a fly driving along the street which had caught her eye as she passed. She knew it very well; it was Jobling's fly—a nice respectable clean cab, looking for all the world like a shabby well-dressed man in a frock coat and high hat. There are many shabby respectable well-preserved things which resemble each other. The reason why this neat and clean vehicle caught her eye was that the man who was driving it wore a white wedding-favour, which is a thing which no person of twenty can see without remark. Lottie, like others of her age, was half amused, half interested, and could not help wondering who it was. It was going to the railway, and some one looked out hastily as Lottie passed, looking at her, the girl thought, withdrawing as hastily again when she was seen to turn her eyes that way. Who could it be? Lottie thought she would ask Law, who knew all the news, who had been married; but she had forgotten all about it long before she saw Law. She had too many things to think of and to do, to remember so small a matter as that; and Law did not come in till late. When he did come they took their simple supper together amicably, not saying much; but she forgot the question. Now that Lottie did not

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bully him they were very good friends. They said a few friendly words to each other, and that was all, and then they bade each other good night. They were all alone, the Captain having left home for a few days, and had a very good opportunity for talk. But Lottie did not seize the opportunity to put disagreeable questions. She was altogether so much more amicable than she had been used to be.

Three days after, Captain Despard was to come home. It did not disturb Lottie that Captain Temple questioned her very closely as to where her father had gone. 'Was he alone, do you know?' the old man said. 'Alone? Oh, yes, I suppose so,' said Lottie. What did it matter? She could see Rollo behind the old beech-tree. Of course it was a drawback that the Captain should be with her so often, but it pleased the kind old man; they met and they had their little talk, which perhaps was all the more unlike the common intercourse of earth that worlds of meaning had to be trusted to a tone, to a sudden meeting in the dusk (when you could see nobody, Captain Temple said) of two pairs of eyes: and when all is unutterable is not this as good a way of utterance as any? And then Lottie said she must go home. Papa was coming home. He had been gone three days. As they went back the old Captain was

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more and more kind to Lottie. He kept her at the door for a moment with her hand between his two old kind hands. 'My dear, don't be afraid to send for me or to come to me when you want anything—my wife and I will always be ready to be of use to you. You will not forget, Lottie?' 'Oh, no, Captain Temple,' she said; 'you are always so kind to me; how could I forget?' And she went in smiling to herself, wondering what he could think she would want. But he was always kind, as kind as a father; far, far kinder than her own father, she could not but remember, with a little shrug of her shoulders. Had papa come in? Mary said 'No,' and Lottie went into the little dining-room to see that the supper was prettily arranged. There was nothing more than cold meat, and cheese, and bread and butter; but the bouquet in the middle, which was made up of brilliantly-coloured leaves, was pretty; and the white tablecloth and the plates and glasses looked bright. In her happiness she began to sing softly as she pulled the leaves into a prettier form in the long clear glass they were grouped in. The lamp was lighted, the table was bright, the door stood open. Lottie, through her singing, heard steps coming up the pavement outside, and voices. All of a sudden she paused, thinking she heard her father's voice. Who

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could he be bringing with him, without any preparation? She cast a hasty glance at the beef, and saw with satisfaction that there would be enough for a stranger; enough, but not perhaps too much—he might have let her know. Then she heard his voice quite close to the window, which was open, for the night was warm for October—'Look in, and you will see her,' he said. 'Oh, I know her very well,' said another voice, with a laugh. Lottie turned round, with her heart beating, towards the window, where something white was visible. What could it mean?—was it a woman?—*a woman* with her father at this hour of the evening? She grew pale, she could not tell why, and gazed first at the window, then at the door, with a flutter of tears which she could not understand. How foolish it was! 'Come in—this way—don't be afraid! The passage is narrow and the house is small, but there is plenty of room for happiness when once you are in it,' said her father's voice in the doorway, coming through the little crooked hall. Then the door was pushed wide open, and he came in leading some one by the hand. It was a woman very gaily dressed, with a mountain of brown hair and a white bonnet perched upon it, who laughed, but was nervous too; upon whom Lottie gazed with wondering eyes and

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blanched cheeks. Who was this whom he was bringing in without warning, without notice? The Captain was very jaunty; his hat was still on his head over his left ear. He had a bunch of violets somewhat crushed in his coat. He smiled a smile which was rather ghastly as Lottie gazed, struck dumb with the horror of what was coming. 'Mrs. Despard,' he said with a flourish, 'let me present you with a ready-made daughter. Lottie, my child, come here and welcome your new mamma.'

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE.

LOTTIE could do nothing but stand bewildered and gaze at this new claimant of her regard. Surprise took all the meaning, all the intelligence out of her face. She stood with her eyes wide open, her lips dropping apart. Her new mamma! She had the indescribable misfortune of not being able to think upon her own mother with any reverence or profound affection. Mrs. Despard was but 'poor mamma' to her—no more. Lottie could not shut her eyes to the deficiencies of that poor woman, of whom the best that could be said was that she was dead, and beyond the reach of blame. There was no cherished and vaunted idea, therefore, to be outraged; but perhaps all the more Lottie's soul rose up in rebellion against the title as applied to anyone else. She had known what was coming, and yet she was as entirely taken by surprise as if this idea had never been suggested to her. With eyes suddenly cleared out of all the dazzling that

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had clouded them, she looked at the woman thus brought in upon her—this intruder, who, however, had more right to be there than even Lottie had—the Captain's wife. If this event had happened a month or two ago, while she retained all her natural vigour, no doubt, foolish as it was, Lottie would have made some show of resistance. She would have protested against the sudden arrival. She would have withdrawn from company so undesirable. She would have tried, however absurd it might have been, to vindicate herself, to hold the new-comer at arm's length. But this had all become impossible now. At no other moment could she have been so entirely taken by surprise. All the apprehensions about her father which had been communicated to her on former occasions had died out of her mind. She had never said very much about this danger, or been alarmed by it, as Law was. It had not occurred to her to inquire how it would affect herself. And now she was taken altogether by surprise. She stood struck dumb with amazement, and gazed at the woman, instinctively taking in every particular of her appearance, as only a woman could do. Unconsciously to herself, Lottie appraised the other, saw through her, calculating the meaning of her and all her finery. No man could have done it, and she

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was not herself aware of having done it; but Polly knew very well what that look meant. Notwithstanding her own confidence in her bridal array, even Polly felt it coming to pieces, felt it being set down for what it was worth; and, naturally, the feeling that this was so made her angry and defiant.

'How do you do, miss?' she said, feeling that even her voice sounded more vulgar than it need have done. 'I hope as we shall be good friends. Your pa has played you a nice trick, hasn't he? But men is men, and when they're like he is there's allowances to be made for them.' Polly was aware that this speech was in her very worst style. She had not intended to call Lottie Miss; but with that girl standing staring, in a plain cotton frock, looking a lady, every inch of her, from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot—a bride, in a fine bonnet covered with orange-blossoms, and a bright silk dress that matched, was not in possession of her faculties. Bold as she was, she could not but be conscious of a tremor which mingled with her very defiance. 'Well, I'm sure, what a pretty table!' she resumed. 'They might have known we were coming home, Captain. There ain't much on it, perhaps—not like the nice chicken and sausages you'd have got at mother's. But mother would never have

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set it out so pretty, that I'll allow.' Then Polly looked round upon the dim old walls, faintly lighted by the lamp. 'So this is the dining-room,' she said; 'this is my new 'ome. To think I never should have been inside the door till now! Let me alone, Harry. I don't want none of your huggings. I want to make acquaintance with my new 'ome. You know well enough I married just as much for the sake of living in the Lodges as for you—don't you, now?' she said, with a laugh. Perhaps only fathers and mothers, and not even these long-suffering persons always, can look on at the endearments of newly-married couples with tolerance. Lottie was offended, as if their endearments had been insulting to herself. She looked at them with an annoyed contempt. No sympathetic touch of fellow-feeling moved her. To compare this, as she thought, hideous travesty of love with her own, would have but hardened her the more against them. She turned away, and shut the window, and drew down the blind with an energy uncalled for by such simple duties. When the Captain led his wife upstairs, that she might take off her bonnet, Lottie sat down and tried to think. But she could not think. It had all happened in a moment, and her mind was in an angry confusion, not capable of reason. She could

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not realise what had happened, or what was going to happen—an indignant sense of being intruded upon, of having to receive and be civil to an unwelcome visitor, and an impatience almost beyond bearing of this strait into which her father had plunged her, filled her mind. Something more, she dimly felt, lay behind—something more important, more serious; but in the meantime she did not feel that her occupation was gone, or her kingdom taken from her. A disagreeable person to entertain—a most unwelcome, uncongenial guest. For the moment she could not realise anything more. But her mind was in the most painful ferment, her heart beating. How was she to behave to this new, strange visitor? What was she to say to her? She must sit down at table with her, she supposed. She was Captain Despard's—guest. What more? But Lottie knew very well she was something more.

Mary came in, bringing tea, which she placed at the head of the table, where Lottie usually sat. Mary's eyes were dancing in her head with curiosity and excitement. 'What is it, miss? oh, what is it, miss? What's happened?' said Mary. But Lottie made her no reply. She did not herself know what had happened. She waited for the return of 'the woman' with a troubled mind. Everything

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was ready, and Lottie stood by ready to take her seat the moment they should come back. She heard them come downstairs, laughing and talking. The woman's voice filled all the house. It flowed on in a constant stream, loud enough to be heard in the kitchen, where Mary was listening with all her ears. 'Very nice on the whole,' the new-comer was saying; 'but of course I shall make a few changes. I've always heard that a room should be like its mistress. There's not half enough pretty things to please me. I do love a pretty room, and plenty of antimacassars and pink ribbons. Oh, I shan't tell *you* what I am going to do to it!—not a word. Gentlemen must be taught their place. I am going to make it look very nice, and that should be enough for you. Oh yes, I am quite ready for supper. I haven't touched a bit of anything since five o'clock, when we had tea. Poor Harry! I can see how you have been put upon.' This was said at the foot of the stairs, where not only Lottie but Mary could hear every word. Mary understood it all, but Lottie did not understand it. She could not receive Polly's programme into her mind, nor think what was meant by it. While she still stood waiting, the two came in—the bride, with her tower of hair upon her head, and all her cheap ribbons and bangles. She came

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in, drawing herself away from the Captain's encircling arm. 'Behave!' said Polly, shaking a finger at him; and she swept in and round the table, almost pushing against the surprised spectator who stood looking on, and deposited herself in Lottie's chair. 'It's best to begin as you mean to end,' said Polly; 'I'm not tired to speak of, and I'll take my own place at once. You can sit here, Miss Lottie, between him and me.'

Still, Lottie did not know what to think or to say. She stood still, bewildered, and then took the place pointed out to her. What did it mean? It was easy enough to see what it meant, if her head had not been so confused. 'Yes, dear,' said Polly, 'a little bit of cold beef —just a very little bit. I am not fond of cold victuals. That's not how we've been living, is it? and that's not how I mean you to live. Oh, no, I don't blame Lottie. Unmarried girls don't know any better. They don't study a man like his wife knows how to do. I can see how it's been; oh, I can see! Too many mouths to feed, and the meat has to be bought according. Who is your butcher, miss? Oh, *him!* I don't hold with him. I shall send for Jones to-morrow; he's the man for my money. Wasn't that a lovely sweetbread that we had at our wedding breakfast? You didn't remark? Oh,

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nonsense, I'm sure you remarked! It *was* a beauty! Well, that was from Jones's. I'll send for him to-morrow. Do you take sugar in your tea, Miss Lottie? Dear! I shouldn't have thought it; so careful a young lady. 'Enery, darling, what are you drinking? Do you take tea?'

'I don't mind what I take, my love, so long as you give it me,' said the gallant Captain; 'tea or poison, I'd take it from that hand; and I don't want anything but to look at you at the head of my table. This is how it should be. To think how long I have been denying myself, forgetting what happiness was!'

'You poor dear Harry! all for the sake of your children! Well, I hope you'll find it repaid. They ought to be grateful. The times and times that you and me has talked it over, and given it up for their sakes! You're very quiet, miss; you don't say much,' added Polly; 'but I dare say it was a surprise to you, seeing me come home?'

'Why don't you speak up and make yourself pleasant?' said the Captain, with a kind of growl, under his breath.

Lottie came to herself a little by dint of this pressure. She did not seem to know how it had come about, or what the emergency meant. 'I beg your pardon,' she said, her head swim-

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ming and everything going round with her, 'I am—taken very much by surprise. If I had known what was going to happen I—might have been more prepared.'

'I can understand that,' said Polly. 'Hold your tongue, Captain. She is quite right. You ought to have written and told her, as I asked you. But now that you do know I hope you mean to be friendly, miss. Them that treats me well, I treats them well. I don't wonder that you don't like it at first,' she added graciously; 'a girl no older than yourself! But he would have it, you know, and what could I do? When a man's in that way, it's no use talking to him. I resisted as long as I could, but I had to give in at the last.'

'By George!' said the Captain, helping the beef. He had some one to stand by him now, who he felt might be a match for Lottie; but he was still a little afraid of Lottie, and consequently eager to crow over her in the strength of his backer. 'The trouble I've had to bring matters to this point!' he said. 'But never mind, my love, it is all right now you are here. 'At one time I thought it never was going to be accomplished. But perseverance——'

'Perseverance does a deal; but, bless you, I never had no doubt on the subject,' said the new Mrs. Despard, taking up her teacup in a

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way that was very offensive to Lottie. The Captain looked at her from the other end of the table with a kind of adoration; but nevertheless the Captain himself, with all his faults, was painfully aware of her double negatives, and thought to himself, even when he looked at her so admiringly, that he must give her a few lessons. He had never paid much attention to Lottie, and yet he could not help getting a glimpse of his new wife through Lottie's eyes.

'Where is my son?' said Polly. 'Harry, darling, where is that dear Law? He won't be so much surprised, will he? He had a notion how things were going. But I've got a great deal to say to him, I can tell you. I don't approve of his goings on. There's a many things as I mean to put a stop to. Nobody shall say as I don't do my duty by your children. I shall tell him——'

'Do you know Law?' said Lottie. This gave her a little chill of horror; though indeed she remembered that Law had spoken of some one—some one about whom Lottie had not cared to inquire.

'Oh, yes, miss, I know Law.' (Polly did not know how it was that she said Miss to Lottie. She did not mean to do it. She did it, not in respect, but in derision; but the word came to her lips, whether she would or not.) 'Law

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and I are old friends. Time was when I didn't feel sure—not quite sure, you know,' she said, with a laugh of mingled vanity and malice, 'if it was to be the father or the son; but, Lord, there's no comparison,' she added hastily, seeing that even on the Captain's fine countenance this boast produced a momentary cloud. 'Law will never be as fine a man as his father. He hasn't got the Captain's carriage, nor he ain't so handsome. Bless us, are you listening, Harry? I didn't mean you to hear. I don't think you handsome a bit, now, do I? I'm sure I've told you times and times——'

The two thus exchanging glances and pretty speeches across the table were too much occupied with themselves to think of anything else. And no one heard Law's approach till he pushed open the door, and with a 'Hillo!' of absolute amazement, stood thunderstruck, gazing upon this astonishing spectacle. The sight that Law beheld was not a disagreeable sight in itself: the table, all bright with its bouquet of crimson leaves, which the Captain had pushed to one side in order that he might see his wife—and the three faces round it, two of them beaming with triumph and satisfaction. The young man stood at the door and took it all in, with a stare, at first, of dismay. Opposite to him sat Lottie, put out of her place, looking stunned, as if she

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had fallen from a height and did not know where she was. As he stood there she lifted her eyes to him with a look of wondering and bewildered misery which went to Law's heart; but the next moment he burst into a loud laugh, in spite of himself. To see the governor casting languishing looks at Polly was more than his gravity could bear. He could think of nothing, after the first shock, but 'what a joke' it was. A man in love, especially a man in the first imbecility of matrimonial bliss, is a joke at any time; but when it's your governor, Law said to himself! He gave a great roar of laughter. 'Polly, by Jove!' he said; 'so you've been and done it!' It had alarmed him much beforehand, and no doubt it might be tragical enough after; but for the moment it was the best joke that Law had encountered for years.

'Yes, we've been and done it,' said Polly, rising and holding out her hand to him. 'Come here and kiss me, my son. I am delighted to see you.' It's so nice to hear a good laugh, and see a bright face. Lottie, Law, hasn't found her tongue yet. She hasn't a word to throw at a dog, much less her new mamma. But you, it's a pleasure to see you. Ah!' said Polly, with effusion, 'the gentlemen for me! Ladies, they're spiteful, and they're jealous, and they're

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stuck up ; but gentlemen does you justice. You mustn't call me Polly, however, though I forgive you the first time. You must know that I am your mamma.'

Law laughed again, but it was not a pleasant laugh ; and he grasped the hand which his father held out to him with a desire to crush it, if he could, which was natural enough. Law thought it a joke, it is true ; but he was angry at bottom, though amused on the surface. And he did hurt his father's somewhat flabby, unworking hand. The Captain, however, would not complain. He was glad even to be met with a semblance of cordiality at such a moment. He helped Law largely to the beef, in the satisfaction of this family union, and this was a sign of anxiety which Law did not despise.

'Oh, and I assure you I mean to be a mother to you,' said Polly. 'It shan't be said now that you haven't anyone to look after you. *I* mean to look after you. I am not at all satisfied with some of your goings on. A gentleman shouldn't make too free with them that are beneath him. Yes, yes, Harry, darling ; it's too early to begin on that point ; but he shall know my mind, and *I* mean to look after him. Now this is what I call comfortable,' said Mrs. Despard, looking

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round with a beaming smile; 'quite a family party, and quite a nice tea; though the beef's dry to my taste (but I never was one for cold victuals), and everybody satisfied——'

'Lottie,' said the Captain, looking up from his beef with some sternness, 'you seem the only exception. Don't you think, my child, when you see everybody so happy, that you might find a word to say?'

'Oh, don't hurry her,' said Polly; 'we've took her by surprise. I told you not to, but you would. We'll have a nice long talk to-morrow, when she gives me over the housekeeping; and when she sees as I mean to act like a mother, why things will come right between her and me.'

The Despards were not highly educated people, but yet a shiver ran through them when Polly, unconscious, said, 'We've took her by surprise.' The Captain even shrank a little, and took a great deal too much mustard, and made himself cough; while Law, in spite of himself, laughed, looking across the table to the place where Lottie sat. Lottie noticed it the least of all. She heard every word they all said, and remembered every word, the most trifling; but at the moment she scarcely distinguished the meaning of them. She said, 'I think, papa, if you don't mind, I will go to my room. I am

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rather tired; and perhaps I had better give some orders to Mary.'

'Oh, never mind; never mind about Mary, if it's on my account. I shall look after her myself,' said Polly. 'What's good enough for the Captain is good enough for me; at least, till I settle it my own way, you know. I don't want to give any trouble at all, till I can settle things my own way.'

'It is not I that have to be consulted,' said Captain Despard; 'but if you are going to sit sulky and not say a word, I don't see—what do you think, my pet?—that it matters whether you go or stay——'

'Oh, don't mind me, Miss, said Polly. She could not look Miss Despard in the face and call her Lottie, knowing, however she might consent to waive her own rights, that Miss Despard was still Miss Despard, whatever Polly might do. Not a thing on her that was worth five shillings, not a brooch even; nothing like a bracelet; a bit of a cotton frock, no more; but she was still Miss Despard, and unapproachable. Polly, with her bracelets on each wrist, rings twinkling on her hands as she took her supper, in a blue silk, and knowing herself to be an officer's lady—Mrs. Captain Despard—with all this, could not speak to her husband's

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daughter except as Miss. She could not understand it, but still it was so.

The little crooked hall was full of boxes when Lottie came out; and Mary stood among them, wondering how she was to get them upstairs. Perhaps she had been listening a little at the door, for Mary's consternation was as great as Lottie's. 'Do you think, Miss, it's real and true? Do you think as she's married, sure? Mother wouldn't let me stay a day if there was anything wrong, and I don't know as I'll stay anyhow,' Mary said.

'Wrong? what could be wrong?' said Lottie. She was less educated in knowledge of this kind than the little maid-of-all-work. It troubled her to see the boxes littering the hall, but *she* could not carry them upstairs. For a moment the impulse to do it, or, at least, to help Mary in doing it, came into her mind; but, on second thoughts, she refrained. What had she to do with this new-comer into the house, who was not even a visitor, who had come to remain? Lottie went upstairs without saying any more. She went first into the little faded drawing-room, where there was no light except that which came from the window and the lamp in the Dean's Walk. It was not beautiful. She had never had any money to decorate it, to make it what it might have been,

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nor pretty furniture to put into it. But she sat down on her favourite little chair, in the dark, and felt as if she had gone to sit by somebody that was dead, who had been a dear friend. How friendly and quiet the little room had been! giving her a centre for her life, a refuge for her thoughts. But all that was over. She had never known before that she had liked it or thought of it much; but now, all at once, what a gentle and pleasant shelter it had been! As Lottie thought of everything, the tears came silently and bitterly into her eyes. She herself had been ungrateful, unkind to the little old house, the venerable old place, the kind people. They had all been kind to her. She had visited her own disappointment upon them, scorning the neighbours because they were less stately than she expected them to be; visiting upon them her own discontent with her position, her own disappointment in being less important than she expected. Lottie was hard upon herself, for she had not been unkind to anyone, but was, on the contrary, a favourite with her neighbours—the only girl in the place, and allowed by the old people to have a right to whims and fancies. Now, in the face of this strange, incomprehensible misfortune, she felt the difference. Her quiet old room! where kind voices had spoken to her, where *he* had come,

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saying such words as made her heart beat; where she had sung to him, and received those tender applauses which had been like treasure to Lottie. She seemed to see a series of past scenes like pictures rising before her. Not often had Rollo been there—yet two or three times; and Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, with her mellow brogue, and Mr. Ashford, and even the stately person of the Dean himself. She had been at home here, to receive them, whoever came. The room had never been invaded by anything that was unfriendly or unpleasing. Now—what was it that woman said of changes —making it look nice? Lottie had not understood the words when they were said, but they came back upon her now.

By-and-by she heard some one coming upstairs, and, starting, rose to steal away to her own room, afraid to meet the stranger again; but no light made its appearance, and Law put in his head at the door, then seeing something moving against the window, came to her, and threw himself down on the window-seat. 'They're going on so downstairs, that I couldn't stand it,' said Law; 'it's enough to make a fellow sick'—and then, after a pause, 'Well! I told you what was coming, but you wouldn't believe me; what do you think of it now?'

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'Oh, Law, what does it mean?—Are we not dreaming? Can it be true?'

'True! of course it is true. I told you what was going to happen.' Then his tone softened. 'Poor Lottie, it's you I'm sorry for. If you could only see yourself beside her! And where were his eyes, that he couldn't see?' Here Law paused abruptly, wondering all at once whether the difference would be as marked between his sister and the girls whom he too liked to spend his evenings with. He was sure that Emma was not like that woman; but still the thought subdued his indignation. 'I say,' he added hastily, 'I want to give you a bit of advice. Just you give in to her, Lottie. Fighting is no good: she has got a tongue that you couldn't stand, and the things she would say you wouldn't understand. I understand her well enough; but you wouldn't know what she meant, and it would make you angry and hurt you. Give in, Lottie. Since the governor's been so silly, she has a right. And don't you make any stand as if you could do it—for you can't. It is a great deal better not to resist——'

'What do you mean by resist? How can I resist? The house is papa's, I suppose?' said Lottie. 'The thing is, I don't understand it. I can't understand it: that somebody should

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be coming to stay here, to be one of us, to be mixed up in everything—whom we don't know——'

'To be mistress,' said Law, 'that's the worst—not to be mixed up with us, but to be over us. To take everything out of your hands——'

'Do you think I care for that? I do not mind who is mistress,' said Lottie, all unaware of her own characteristics. Law was wiser than she was in this respect. He shook his head.

'That's the worst,' he said; 'she'll be mistress—she'll change everything. Oh, I know Polly well; though I suppose, for decency, I mustn't say Polly now.'

'How is it you know her so well? And how did papa know her?' said Lottie. 'I should have thought you never could have met such women. Ah! you told me once about—others. Law! you can't like company like that; surely, you can't like company like that! how did you get to know her?' Law was very much discomfited by this sudden question. In the midst of his sympathy and compassion for his sister, it was hard all at once to be brought to book, when he had forgotten the possibility of such a danger.

'Well, you know,' he said, 'fellows do; I don't know how it is—you come across some

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one, and then she speaks to you, and then you're forced to speak back; or perhaps it's you that speaks first—it isn't easy to tell. This was as simple as anything,' Law went on, relieved by the naturalness of his own explanation. 'They all work in the same house where Langton lives, my old coach, you know, before I went to old Ashford. I don't know how the governor got there. Perhaps it was the same way. Going in and out, you know, day after day, why, how could you help it? And when a woman speaks to you, what can you do, but say something? That's exactly how it was.'

'But, Law,' she said, grasping his arm—all this conversation was so much easier in the dark—'Law, you will take care? she said she was not quite sure whether it was to be the father or the son. Ah! a woman who could say that, Law——'

'It's a lie,' said Law, fiercely, 'and she knows it. I never thought anything of her—never. It's a lie, if she were to swear it! Polly! why, she's thirty, she's——I give my word of honour, it's a lie.'

'But, Law! oh, Law dear——'

'I know what you're going to say. I'll take care of myself; no fear of me getting entangled,' said Law briskly. Then he stopped, and, still favoured by the dark, took her hands in his.

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'Lottie, it's my turn now. I know you won't stand questioning, nor being talked to. But, look here—don't shilly-shally if you can care for anybody, and he'll marry you and give you a place of your own—You needn't jump up as if I had shot you. If you talk about such things to me, I may surely talk to you. And mind what I say. I don't expect you'll be able to put up with your life here——'

'I hear them stirring downstairs,' said Lottie, drawing her hands out of his hold. 'Don't keep me, don't hold me, Law. I cannot see her again to-night.'

'You won't give me any answer,' said the lad regretfully. There was real feeling in his voice—'But, Lottie, mind what I say. I don't believe you'll be able to put up with it, and if there's anyone you care for and he'll marry you——'

Lottie freed herself from him violently, and fled. Even in the dark there were things that Law could not be permitted to say, or she to hear.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HEAVINGS OF THE EARTHQUAKE.

THE next morning dawned very strangely on all the members of the little household. Lottie was down early, as she generally was; but the advantages of early rising were neutralised by the condition of the little maid, Mary, who was too much excited to do her work, and kept continually coming back to pour her doubts and her difficulties into Lottie's ear. 'I can't get no rest till I've told mother,' Mary said. 'If there's anything wrong, mother won't let me stay, not a day. And even if there's nothing wrong, I don't know as I'll stay. I haven't got no fault to find with you, Miss; nor the Captain, nor even Mr. Law: though he's a dreadful bother with his boots cleaning; but to say as you're beginning as you mean to end, and then to give all that trouble! every blessed thing, I had to drag it upstairs. Mr. Law was very kind; he took up the big box—I couldn't ha' done it; but up and down, up and down, all the little boxes and the bags, and the brown

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paper parcels—"It saves trouble if you begins as you means to end," she says——'

'I don't want to hear what Mrs. Despard says,' said Lottie. Mrs. Despard: it was her mother's name. And though that mother had not been an ideal mother, or one of those who are worshipped in their children's memories, it is wonderful, what a gush of tender recollections came into Lottie's mind with the name. Poor mamma! she had been very kind in her way, always ready to indulge and to pardon, if indifferent to what happened in more important matters. She had never exacted anything, never worried her children about idleness or untidiness, or any of those minor sins which generally make a small girl's life a burden to her. Lottie's mind went back to her, lying on her sofa, languid, perhaps lazy—badly dressed; yet never anything but a lady, with a kind of graciousness in her faded smile, and grace in her faded gown. Not a woman to be held in adoration, and yet—the girl sighed, but set to work to make the little brown dining-room neat, to get the table set, making up for Mary's distracted service by her own extra activity. For amid all the horrors of last night there was one which had cut Lottie very deeply, and that was the many references to the cold beef, and the bride's dislike of 'cold victuals.' It is incon-

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ceivable, among all the more important matters involved, how deeply wounded Lottie's pride had been by this reproach. She resolved that no one should be able to speak so to-day ; and she herself put on her hat and went out to the shop on the Abbey Hill almost as soon as it had opened, that this intolerable reproach should not be in the interloper's power. She met more than one of the old Chevaliers as she came up, for most of them kept early hours and paced the terrace pavement in the morning as if it had been morning parade. They all looked at her curiously, and one or two stopped her to say 'good morning.' 'And a fine morning it is, and you look as fresh as a flower,' one of the old gentlemen said ; and another laid his hand on her shoulder, patting her with a tender fatherly touch. 'God bless you, my dear, the sight of you is a pleasure,' said this old man. How little she had thought or cared for them, and how kind they were in her trouble! She could see that everybody knew. Lottie did not know whether she did not half resent the universal knowledge. Most likely they had known it before she did. The whole town knew it, and everybody within the Precincts. Captain Despard had got married! Such a thing had not occurred before in the memory of man. Many people believed, indeed, that there

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was a law against it, and that Captain Despard was liable to be turned out of his appointment. Certainly it was unprecedented; for the old Chevaliers before they came to St. Michael's had generally passed the age at which men marry. The whole scene seemed to have taken a different aspect to Lottie. Since her home had become impossible to her, it had become dear. For the first time she felt how good it was to look across upon the noble old buttresses of the Abbey, to inhabit that 'retired leisure,' that venerable quietness. If only that woman were not there! But that woman was there, and everything was changed. Lottie had been rudely awakened, dragged, as it were, out of her dreams. She could not think as she usually did of the meetings that were sure to come somehow in the Abbey, or on the Slopes —or count how long it would be till the afternoon or evening, when she should see him. This, though it was her life, had been pushed out of the way. She thought of all last night's remarks about the cold beef and the poor fare, and the changes that were going to be made. Would she think bacon good enough for breakfast?—would she be satisfied with the rolls, which Lottie herself felt to be a holiday indulgence? Pride, and nothing but pride, had thrown the girl into such excesses. She could

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not endure those criticisms again. Her brain was hot and hazy, without having any power of thought. The confusion of last night was still in her. Would it all turn out a dream? or would the door open by-and-by and show this unaccustomed figure? Lottie did not feel that she could be sure of anything. The first to come down was Law, who had been forced from his bed for once by sympathy. Law was very kind to Lottie. 'I thought I wouldn't leave you to face her by yourself,' he said; 'they're coming down directly.' Then Lottie knew that it was no dream.

The bride came down in a blue merino dress, as blue as the silk of last night. Polly was of opinion that she looked well in blue; and it was not one of the ethereal tints that are now used, but a good solid, full blue, quite uncompromising in point of colour. And the hair on her head was piled up as if it would reach the skies, or the ceiling at least. She came down arm-in-arm with her husband, the two smiling upon each other, while Law and Lottie stood one on each side of the table with no smiles, looking very serious. It was Mrs. Despard who did the most of the conversation; for the Captain was passive, feeling, it must be allowed, somewhat embarrassed by the presence of his children, who did not embarrass her at all.

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But she did not think the bacon very good. She thought it badly cooked. She thought the girl could not have been well trained to send it up like that. And she was not pleased either with the rolls; but announced her intention of changing the baker as well as the butcher. 'We've always gone to Willoughby's, as long as I can recollect, and I don't fancy any bread but his.' Lottie did not say anything, she was nearly as silent as on the previous night; and Law, who was opposite, though he made faces at her now and then, and did his best to beguile his sister into a laugh, did not contribute much to the conversation. He got up as soon as he had swallowed his breakfast and got his books. 'I'm off to old Ashford,' he said.

'Where are you going, Law?—you must never get up from table without asking my leave—it is dreadful unmannerly. You have got into such strange ways; you want me to bring you back to your manners, all of you. Who are you going to?—not to Mr. Langton as you used to do—I'm glad of that.'

'I don't see why you should be glad of that. I'm going to old Ashford,' said Law, gloomily. 'He is a much better coach than Langton. I have not anything to do to-day, Lottie; I shall be back at twelve o'clock.'

'Dear me,' said Mrs. Despard, 'how long is

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Law going on going to school like a little boy? I never heard of such a thing, at his age. He should be put into something where he could earn a little money for himself, instead of costing money; a great, strong young fellow like that. I think you're all going to sleep here. You want me, as anybody can see, to wake you up, and save you from being put upon, my poor man. But I hope I know how to take care of my own husband, and see that he gets the good of what he has, and don't just throw it away upon other folks. And I begin as I means to end,' said Polly, with a little toss of her head. Law, stopped by the sound of her voice, had turned round at the door, and contemplated her with gloomy looks; but seeing it was not to come to anything bad, went away. And the bell began, and the Captain rose. His bride came to him fondly, and brushed a crumb or two off his coat and arranged the flower in his buttonhole. 'Now you look quite sweet,' she said with genuine enthusiasm. 'I ain't going in the morning, when none but the regular folks is there, but I mean to go, my dear, in the afternoon. It's only proper respect, living in the Precincts; but you won't be long, dear? You'll come home to your poor little wife, that don't know what to do without her handsome husband? Now, won't you, dear?'

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'I'll be back as fast as my legs can carry me,' said the Captain. 'Come and meet me, my pet. Lottie will tell you when the voluntary begins——'

'Oh, I can tell very well without Lottie,' said the bride, hanging upon him till he reached the door. All these endearments had an indescribable effect upon the girl, who was compelled to stand by. Lottie turned her back to them and re-arranged the ornaments on the mantelpiece, with trembling hands, exasperated almost beyond the power of self-restraint. But when the Captain was gone, looking back in his imbecility to kiss his hand to his bride, the situation changed at once. Polly turned round, sharp and business-like, in a moment. 'Ring the bell, Miss,' she said, 'and tell the girl to clear them things away. And then, if you will just hand me over the keys, and let me see your housekeeping things and your stores and all that, we may settle matters without any trouble. I likes to begin as I mean to end,' said Polly peremptorily. Lottie stood and looked at her for a moment, her spirit rekindling, her mind rising up in arms against the idea of obedience to this stranger. But what would be the use of trying to resist? Resist! what power had she? The very pride which rebelled against submission made the submission inevitable. She could not

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humiliate herself by a vain struggle. Polly, who was very doubtful of the yielding of this natural adversary, and rather expected to have a struggle for her 'rights,' was quite bewildered by the meekness with which the proud girl, who scarcely took any notice of her, she thought, acquiesced in the orders she gave. Lottie rang the bell. She said, 'You will prefer, I am sure, to give Mary her orders without me. There are not many keys, but I will go and get what I have.'

'Not many keys! and you call yourself a housekeeper?' said Polly. Lottie turned away as the little maid came in, looking impertinent enough to be a match for the new mistress; but Lottie was no match for her. She went and got out her little housekeeping-book, which she had kept so neatly. She gathered the keys of the cupboards, which generally stood unlocked, for there was not so much in them that she should lock them up. Lottie had all the instincts of a housekeeper. It gave her positive pain to hand over the symbols of office—to give up her occupation. Her heart sank as she prepared to do it. All her struggles about the bills, her anxious thought how this and that was to be paid, seemed elements of happiness now. She could not bear to give them up. The pain of this compulsory abdication drove everything else out of her head. Love, they say, is all a

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woman's life, but only part of a man's; yet Lottie forgot even Rollo—forgot his love and all the consolation it might bring, in this other emergency, which was petty enough, yet all-important to her. She trembled as she got together these little symbols of her domestic sovereignty. She heard the new mistress of the house coming up the stairs as she did so, talking all the way. 'I never heard such impudence,' Polly was saying. 'Speak back to her mistress! a bit of a chit of a maid-of-all-work like that. I suppose she's been let do whatever she pleased; but she'll find out the difference.' Behind Polly's voice came a gust of weeping from below, and a cry of, 'I'm going to tell mother:' thus hostilities had commenced all along the line.

'I can't think how ever you got on with a creature like that,' said Polly, throwing herself down in the easy-chair. 'She don't know how to do a single thing, as far as I can see; but some folks never seem to mind. She shan't stay here not a day longer than I can help. I've given her warning on the spot. To take impudence from a servant the very first day! But that's always the way when things are let go; the moment they find a firm hand over them there's a to-do. To be sure it wasn't to be

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looked for that you could know much, Miss, about managing a house.'

'Mary is a very good girl,' said Lottie hastily. 'She has always done what I told her. Here are the keys of the cupboards, since you wish for them; but there are not any stores to lock away. I get the things every week, just enough to use——'

'And don't lock them up!' Polly threw up her hands. 'That's one way of housekeeping; but how should you know any better, poor thing, brought up like that! I'm sure I don't mean to be hard upon you; but you should have thought a bit of your papa, and not have wasted his money. However, that's all over now. A man wants a nice 'ome to come back to, he wants a nice dinner on the table, he wants somebody that can talk to him, to keep him out of mischief. Oh, I know very well the Captain's been fond of having his fling. I ain't one of the ignorant ones, as don't know a man's ways. And I like that sort much the best myself. I like a man to be a man, and know what's what. But you'll soon see the difference, now that he's got some one to amuse him, and some one to make him comfortable at home. So these are all, Miss Lottie? And what's this? oh, a book! I don't think much of keep-

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ing books. You know how much you has to spend, and you spend it; that's my way.'

Lottie made no reply. She felt it to be wiser for herself, but no doubt it was less respectful to Polly, who paused now and then for a reply, then went on again, loving to hear herself talk, yet feeling the contempt involved in this absence of all response. At last she cried angrily, 'Have you lost your tongue, Miss, or do you think as I'm not good enough to have an answer, though I'm your papa's wife?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Lottie; 'I—don't know what to say to you. We don't know each other. I don't understand—— Don't you see,' she cried suddenly, unable to restrain herself, 'that since you came into the house you have done nothing but—find fault with all my—arrangements—' (these mild words came with the utmost difficulty; but Lottie was too proud to quarrel). 'You can't think that I could like that. I have done my best, and if you try as I have done, you will find it is not so easy. But I don't want to defend myself; that is why I don't say anything. There can be no good in quarrelling, whether you think me a bad housekeeper or not.'

'I ain't so sure of that,' said Polly. 'Have a good flare-up, and be done with it, that's my way. I don't hold with your politeness, and

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keeping yourself to yourself. I'd rather quarrel than be always bursting with spite and envy, like some folks. It stands to reason as you must hate me, taking things out of your hands; and it stands to reason as I should think more of my own husband than of keeping up your brother and you in idleness. But for all that, and though we might fight now and then—everybody does, I don't care nothing for a girl as is always the same—I don't see why we shouldn't get on neither. The Captain says as you've a very good chance of a husband yourself. And though I'm just about your own age, I've had a deal of experience. I know how to bring a man to the point, if he's shilly-shallying, or won't speak up like a man, as a girl has a right to expect.'

'Oh! stop, stop, stop!' cried Lottie, wild with horror. She cast a hurried glance round, to see what excuse she could make for getting away. Then she seized eagerly upon her music which lay on the old square piano. 'I must go to my lesson,' she said.

'Your lesson! Are you having lessons too? Upon my word! Oh, my poor husband! my poor Captain! No wonder as he has nothing but cold beef to eat,' said Polly, with all the fervour of a deliverer, finding out one misery after another. 'And if one might make so bold

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as to ask, Miss, who is it as has the honour to give lessons to you?'

'The Signor—Mr. Rossinetti,' Lottie added, after a moment. It seemed desecration to talk of any of the familiar figures within the Abbey precincts by their familiar title to this intruder.

'Oh! I'm not so ignorant as not to know who the Signor is. That will be half-a-guinea, or at the least seven-and-six a lesson!' she said, raising her hands in horror. 'Oh, my poor 'usband! This is how his money goes! Miss,' said Polly, severely, 'you can't expect as I should put up with such goings on. I have your papa to think of, and I won't see him robbed—no, not whatever you may do. For I call that robbery, just nothing else. Half-a-guinea a lesson, and encouraging Law to waste his time! I can't think how you can do it: with that good, dear, sweet, confiding man letting you have your own way, and suspecting nothing,' cried Polly, clasping her hands. Then she got up suddenly. 'I declare,' she cried, 'church is near over, and me not ready to go out and meet him! I can't go out a figure, in a common rag like this, and me a bride. I must put on my silk. Of course, he wants to show me off a bit before his friends. I'll run and get ready, and we can talk of this another time.'

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Thus Lottie escaped for the moment. She was asked a little later to see if Mrs. Despard's collar was straight, and to pin on her veil. 'Do I look nice?' said Polly triumphant, and at the same time mollified by the services which Lottie rendered without objection. She had put on her 'blue silk' and the bonnet with the orange-blossoms, and neckties enough to stock a shop. 'Perhaps, as there's nothing ordered, and I mean to make a change with the tradespeople, the Captain and me won't come back to dinner,' said Polly. 'There's your favourite cold beef, Miss, for Law and you.' Lottie felt that she began to breathe when, rustling and mincing, her strange companion swept out, in the face of all the people who were dispersing from matins, to meet her husband. Polly liked the wondering encounter of all their eyes. With her blue silk sweeping the pavement after her, and her pink parasol, and the orange-blossoms on her bonnet, her figure descending the Dean's Walk alone, while all the others issued out of the Abbey doors, was conspicuous enough. She was delighted to find that everybody looked at her, and even that some stood still to watch her, looking darkly at her finery. These were the people who were jealous, envious of her fine clothes and her happiness, or jealous of her handsome husband, who met her presently, but

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who perhaps was not so much delighted to see her amidst all his fellow-Chevaliers as she thought. Captain Despard was not a man of very fine perceptions; but though his blooming young wife was a splendid object indeed beside the dark, little old figure of Mrs. Temple, he had seen enough to feel that the presence of the old lady brought out into larger prominence something which the younger lacked. But he met her with effusive delight, and drew her hand within his arm, and thus they disappeared together. Outside the Precincts there was no need to make any comparison, and Polly's brilliancy filled all hearts with awe.

When Law returned, he found Lottie seated in her little chair, with her face hidden in her hands. It was not that she was crying, as he feared at first. The face she raised to him was crimson with excitement. 'Oh, Law!' she said, 'Law, Law!' Lottie had got beyond the range of words. After a while she told him all the events of the morning, which did not look half so important when they were told, and they tried to lay their heads together and think what was best to be done. But what could anyone do? Mary could scarcely put the remnants of the cold beef on the table, for her eagerness to tell that she had been to mother, and mother would not hear of her staying. 'Places isn't so hard

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to get as all that, for a girl with a good character,' she said. When she was gone, Lottie looked piteously at her brother.

'What kind of a place could I get?' she said. 'What am I fit for? Oh, Law! I think it is a mistake to be brought up a lady. I never thought it before, but I do now. How can we go on living here? and where are we to go?'

'That's what I always said,' said Law. He was horribly grave, but he had not a word to say except that he had got a match at football, and perhaps might stay and sup with the fellows afterwards. 'I'm just as well out of the way, for what can I do for you? only make things worse,' he said. And though he had been so kind and sympathetic at first, Law stole away, glad to escape, and left Lottie alone, to bear it as she might. She had no lesson that day, though she had pretended to have one. She would not go to the Abbey, where the new member of the family meant to appear, she knew. Lottie stayed in the familiar room which was hers no longer, until the silence became too much for her, and she felt that any human voice would be a relief. She went out in the afternoon, when all seemed quiet, when everybody had gone to the Abbey for the evening service. There would be nobody about, and it seemed to Lottie that the shame

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was upon her, that it was she who must shrink from all eyes. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, however, knocking on the window violently, instantly gave her to understand that this was impracticable. The girl tried to resist, being afraid of herself, afraid of what she might say, and of what might be said to her. But as she hurried on, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy's maid rushed after her. Lottie had to go to her old friend, though very reluctantly. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy had a bad cold. She was sitting wrapped up in a shawl, and a visitor with something to tell was beyond price to her. 'Come and tell me all about it, then!' she cried, 'me poor darlin'!' enveloping Lottie in her large embrace. 'And tell the Major, Sally, and let nobody come in.' The Major came instantly to the call, and Lottie tried to tell her story to the kind couple who sat on either side of her, with many an exclamation.

'I knew that was what it would come to,' Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said.

'And I never thought Despard (saving your presence, my dear) could have been such a fool!' cried the Major.

'Oh, sure, Major, you're old enough to know that every man is a fool where a woman's concerned.'

But what was Lottie to do? They petted

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her and condoled with her, soothing her with their sympathy, and all the tender words they could think of; but they could throw no light upon one point: what could the girl do? Nothing, but put up with it. They shook their heads, but could give her no comfort. If Law had but been doing something instead of idling all his time away! But then Law was not doing anything. What was he good for, any more than Lottie?

'Mary can get another place. Her mother will not let her stay, and she can get another place, she says; but here are two of us, Law and I, and we are good for nothing!' cried Lottie. How her thoughts were altered from the time when she thought it necessary to stay at home, to do no visible work, for the credit of the family! Lottie was not young enough to feel that it was necessary to be consistent. 'We are young and strong and able to work, but we are good for nothing!' she said. And they both looked at her blankly, not knowing what to say.

By-and-by Lottie escaped again into the open air, notwithstanding their anxious invitation that she should stay with them. She was too wretched to stay, and there had come upon her a longing to see another face in which there might be comfort. As she went out she almost

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walked into Captain Temple's arms, who was walking slowly along looking up at her window. The old man took both her hands into his. 'My poor child!' he said. He was not so frankly inquisitive as the good people she had just left, but he drew her hand through his arm and walked with her, bending over her.

'I do not want to tempt you from your duty, my dear; you'll do what is right, I am sure you will do what is right. But I can't bear to think you are in trouble, and we so near. And my wife,' said the old man slightly faltering, 'my wife thinks so, too.' He was not quite so sure of his wife. She had the restraining effect upon her husband which a more reserved and uncommunicative mind has over an impulsive one. He knew what he would like to do, but he was not sure of her, and this put hesitation into his speech.

'Oh! Captain Temple,' cried Lottie, moved at last to tears, 'what am I to do? If I cannot bear it, what am I to do?'

'Come and speak to my wife,' he said; 'come, dear, and see my wife. She can't talk about everything as I do, but she has more sense than anyone, and knows the world. Come with me, Lottie, and see what Mrs. Temple says.'

He thought the sight of the girl in her

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trouble would be enough, and that his wife would certainly say what it was on his own lips to say. Just then, however, there was a sound of doors opening, and old Wykeham came out and looked upon the world with a defiant countenance from the south door of the Abbey, which was a sign that service was over; and the notes of the voluntary began to peal out into the air. Lottie drew her arm from that of her old friend—she could not bear the eyes of the crowd. 'Another time, another time; but I must go now,' she cried, escaping from him and turning towards the Slopes. The old Captain's first impulse was to follow. He stood for a moment gazing after her as she sped along, slim and swift and young, up the deserted road. It was beginning to grow dark, and the evening was colder than it had been yet. Where was she going? To her favourite haunt on the Slopes to get the wind in her face; to let her thoughts go, like birds, into the wide space and distance? If that had been all! The old man thought of an alternative which filled him with alarm. He took a step after her, and then he paused again, and shaking his head, turned back, meeting all the people as they streamed out of the Abbey. Poor child! if she did meet *him* there, what then? It would comfort her to see her lover; and if he was good, as the

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anxious old Chevalier hoped, had not the lover more power to save her than all the world? There was no question of taking Lottie from her father and mother, separating her from her home. If this young man were to offer her a home of her own, where could there be so good a solution to the problem? Captain Temple turned and walked home with a sigh. It was not his way of delivering Lottie, but perhaps it was the way that would be most for her happiness, and who was he that he should interfere? He let her go to her fate with a sigh.

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CHAPTER XXX.

LOTTIE'S FATE.

LOTTIE went up the Dean's Walk hastily, feeling as if she had taken flight. And she was taking flight. She could not bear to meet the people coming from the Abbey, among whom no doubt her father and his wife would be. Lottie was scarcely aware that there was anything else in her mind. She hurried to the Slopes as the natural refuge of her trouble. The wind blowing fresh in her face, the great sweep of distance, the air and the clouds, the familiar rustle of the trees, seemed to have become part of her, a necessity of her living. And the Slopes were almost deserted now. In October the night comes early, the afternoon is short, even before the winds become chill; already it was darkening, though the afternoon service was but newly over. The trees were beginning to lose their gorgeous apparel: every breeze shook down hosts of leaves, shreds of russet brown and pale gold; the wind was wistful and mournful, with a sigh in it that promised

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rain. Lottie saw nobody about. She stole through the trees to her favourite corner, and leaned upon the low parapet, looking over the familiar scene. She was so familiar with it, every line; and yet it seemed to her to-night like scenery in a theatre which by-and-by would collapse and split asunder, and give place to something different. It would vanish from her sight, and in place of it there would appear the dim background of one of the little rooms at home, with a figure in a blue gown relieved against it, tossing about a mountain of braids and plaits. Lottie did not feel sure that this figure would not appear at her very side, lay an imperative hand on her shoulder, and order her to give up the secrets of her own being. Thus she carried her care within her. She stood leaning over the parapet, with the trees rustling around, scarely aware what she was thinking of. Did she expect anyone? She would have said, No. The night was overcast and growing dismal, why should she expect anyone? What reason could he have for coming out here? He could have no instinctive knowledge of her misery, to bring him, and he had no longer that excuse of his cigar after dinner as on the happy nights when the air was still like summer. No! it was only for the stillness, only for the air, only to fling her troublesome thoughts out to the

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horizon and empty her mind, and thus feel it possible to begin again, that she had come. And never had that stillness been so still before. By-and-by this scene would melt away, and it would be the little dining-room in the Lodge, with the white tablecloth and the lamp lighted upon it. She had been weary of her home, she had half despised it; but never had she been disgusted, afraid of it, never loathed the thought of going back to it before. And she could not talk to anybody about this; they were all very kind, ready to be sorry for her, to do anything they could for her, but she could not bear their sympathy to-night.

All at once, in the silence which was so full of the whisper of the leaves and the sighs of the wind, that she had not heard any footstep, there came a voice close to her elbow which made Lottie start.

'Is it really you, Miss Despard? I had almost given up hopes;—and alone! I thought you were never to be alone again?' said Rollo, with pleasure in his voice.

How it startled her! She looked round upon him with so much fright in her eyes that he was half vexed, half angered. Was it possible that Lottie after all was just like the rest, pretending to be astonished by his appearance when she knew as well——

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'You surely are not surprised to see me?' he said, with a short laugh.

'I did not think of seeing you,' she said quietly, and looked away from him again.

Rollo was angry, yet he was touched by something in her tone; and there must be something to cause this sudden change. She had always been so frank and simple in her welcome of him, always with a light of pleasure on her face when he came in sight; but she would not so much as let him see her face now. She looked round with that first start, then turned again and resumed her dreamy gaze into the night. And there was dejection in every line of her figure as she stood dimly outlined against the waning light. Suddenly there came into Rollo's mind a recollection that he had heard something to account for this, without accusing her of petty pretence or affectation.

'Something has happened,' he said, with a sense of relief which surprised himself. 'I remember now. I fear you are not happy about it.'

'No,' she said, with a sigh. Then Lottie made a little effort to recover herself; perhaps he would not care about her troubles. 'It has been a great shock,' she said, 'but perhaps it may not be so bad after a while.'

'Tell me,' said Rollo; 'you know how

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much interest I take in everything that concerns you. Surely, Miss Despard, after this long time that we have been seeing each other, you know that? Won't you tell me? I cannot bear to see you so sad, so unlike yourself.'

'Perhaps that is the best thing that could happen,' said Lottie, 'that I should be unlike myself. I wish I could be like someone with more sense; I have been so foolish! Everybody knows that we are poor; I never concealed it, but I never thought—— Oh! how silly we have been, Law and I! I used to scold him, but I never saw that I was just the same myself. We ought to have learned to do something, if it were only a trade. We are both young and strong, but we are good for nothing, not able to do anything. I used to scold him: but I never thought that I was just as bad myself.'

'Don't say so, don't say so! You were quite right to scold him; men ought to work. But *you*,' cried Rollo with real agitation, 'it is not to be thought of. You! don't speak of such a thing. What is the world coming to, when you talk of working, while such a fellow as I——'

'Ah! that is quite different,' said Lottie. 'You are rich, or, at least, you are the same as if you were rich; but we are really poor, we

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have no money: and everything we have, it is papa's. I suppose he has a right to do whatever he likes with it; it seems strange, but I suppose he has a right. And, then, what is to become of us? How could I be so silly as not to think of that before? It is all my own fault; don't think I am finding fault with papa, Mr. Ridsdale. I suppose he has a right, and I don't want to grumble; it only—seems natural—to tell you.' Lottie did not know what an admission she was making. She sighed again into that soft distant horizon, then turned to him with a smile trembling about her lips. It was a relief to tell him—she could speak to him as she could not speak to Captain Temple or Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, though she had known them so much longer. 'Perhaps I am only out of temper,' she said. She could not but feel more light of heart standing beside him with nobody near; they seemed to belong to each other so.

'How good, how sweet of you to say so,' he cried. 'Then treat me as if it were natural; come and sit down—nobody will interrupt us—and tell me everything I want to know.'

They had met together in Lottie's little drawing-room before, in the eye of day, and three or four times under Lady Caroline's eye; but never before like this, in the twilight, all

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alone in the world, as it were, two of them, and no more. Lottie hesitated for a moment; but what could be wrong in it? There was nobody to disturb them, and her heart was so full; and to talk to him was so pleasant. She seemed able to say more to him than to any other. He understood her at half a word, whereas to the others she had to say everything, to say even more than she meant before they saw what she meant. She sat down, accordingly, in the corner of the seat, and told him all that had happened; herself beginning to see some humour in it as she told the story, half laughing one moment, half crying the next. And Rollo went into it with all his heart. All their meetings had produced their natural effect; for the last fortnight he had felt that he ought to go away, but he had not gone away. He could not deprive himself of her, of their intercourse, which was nothing yet implied so much, those broken conversations, and the language of looks, that said so much more than words. Never, perhaps, had his intercourse with any girl been so simple, yet so unrestrained. If the old Captain sometimes looked at him with suspicion, he was the only one who did so; and Lottie had neither suspicion nor doubt of him, nor had any question as to his 'intentions' arisen in her mind. She told him her grief now, not dully,

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with the heavy depression that cannot be moved, but with gleams of courage, of resolution, even of fun, unable to resist the temptation of Polly's absurdity, seeing it now as she had not been able to see it before. 'I never knew before,' she said fervently, 'what a comfort it was to talk things over—but, then, whom could I talk them over with? Law, who thinks it best not to think, never to mind—but sometimes one is obliged to mind: or Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, whom I cannot say everything to—— or;—Mr. Ridsdale!' said Lottie, in alarm—'pray, pray forgive me if I have bored you. I have been pouring out everything to you. I never thought—I did not intend——'

'Don't tell me that,' he said. 'I hoped you did intend to confide in me, to trust to my sympathy. Who can be so much interested? to whom can it be so important——?' He leaned forward closer to her, and Lottie instinctively drew away from him a hairsbreadth; but she thought that quite natural too, as natural as that she should be able to speak to him better than to anyone else. They had both made the whole avowal of their hearts in saying these words; but it had not been done in words which frightened either or changed their position towards each other. Meanwhile she was content enough, quieted by the sense of leaning

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her trouble upon him, while he was gradually growing into agitation. Lottie had got all her emergency required—his sympathy, his support, the understanding that was so dear to her. After all her trouble she had a moment of ease; her heart was no longer sore, but soothed with the balm of his tender pity and indignation.

But that which calmed Lottie threw Rollo into ever-increasing agitation. A man who has said so much as that to a girl, especially to one who is in difficulty and trouble, is bound even to himself to say more. The crisis began for him where for her it momentarily ended. To love her and as good as tell her so, to receive, thus ingenuously given, that confession of instinctive reliance upon him which was as good as a betrayal of her love; and to let her go and say nothing more—could a man do that and yet be a man? Rollo was not a man who had done right all the days of his life. He had been in very strange company, and had gone through many an adventure; but he was a man whom vice had never done more than touch. Even among people of bad morals he had not known how to abandon the instincts of honour; and in such an emergency what was he to do? Words came thronging to his lips, but his mind was distracted with his own helplessness. What had he to offer? how could he marry? he asked

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himself with a kind of despair. Yet something must be thought of, something suggested. 'Lottie,' he said after that strange pause—'Lottie—I cannot call you Miss Despard any more, as if I were a stranger. Lottie, you know very well that I love you. I am as poor as you are, but I cannot bear this. You must trust to me for everything—you must—Lottie, you are not afraid to trust yourself to me—you don't doubt me?' he cried. His mind was driven wildly from one side to another. Marry! how could he marry in his circumstances? Was it possible that there was anything else that would answer the purpose, any compromise? His heart beat wildly with love and ardour and shame. What would she say? Would she understand him, though he could not understand himself?

'Mr. Ridsdale!' cried Lottie, shrinking back from him a little. She covered her face with her hands and began to cry, being overcome with so many emotions, one heaped on another. At another moment she would not have been surprised; she would have been able to lift her eyes to the glow of the full happiness which, in half-light, had been for weeks past the illumination of her life. But for the moment it dazzled her. She put up her hands between her and that ecstasy of light.

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As for Rollo, very different were the thoughts in his mind. He thought Lottie as wise as himself: he thought she had investigated his words; had not found in them the one that is surety for all, and shrank from him. Shame overwhelmed him: the agony of a mind which was really honest and a heart which was full of tenderness, yet found themselves on the verge of dishonour. 'Lottie!' he cried with anguish in his voice, 'you do not understand me—you will not listen to me. Do not shrink as if I meant any harm.'

Then she uncovered her face, and he saw dimly through the twilight a countenance all trembling with emotion and happiness and astonishment. 'Harm!' she said, with wonder in her voice—'harm!' His heart seemed to stand still, and all his confused thinkings broken off in the unspeakable contrast between the simplicity of her innocence thinking no evil, and the mere knowledge in his mind which, if nothing more, made guilt possible. Such a contrast shamed and horrified, and filled with an adoration of penitence, the man who might have drawn her into evil, ambiguously, had it been possible. He found himself with one knee on the cold gravel, before he knew, pressing his suit upon her with passion. 'Lottie, you must marry me, you must be my wife,

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you must let me be the one to work, to take care of you, to protect you from all trouble,' he cried. But what did Lottie want with those more definite words which he had thought she missed and waited for? Had she not known his secret long ago before he ever spoke a word to her? Had she not been led delicately, tenderly, step by step, through infinite dreams and visions, towards this climax? She cried with happiness and trouble, and the sense of deliverance.

'Oh, why should you kneel to me?' she said. 'Do you think it needs *that?*' While he, more happy than ever he had been in his life, alarmed, disturbed, shaken out of all his habits and traditions, held her fast, like a new-found treasure, and lavished every tender word upon her that language could supply. He owed her a million apologies, of not one of which Lottie was conscious. How could it have been possible for her to suppose that even for a second, in his inmost thoughts, he had been less than reverent of her? And he—had he meant any harm? He did not think he had meant any harm; yet how, in the name of heaven, was he to marry—how was he to marry—in his present circumstances? While he was pouring out upon Lottie his love and worship, telling her how she had gathered to herself day by

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day all his thoughts and wishes, this question rose up again in his heart.

'I know,' said Lottie, very low—her voice still trembling with the first ecstasy of feeling. It was like the dove's voice, all tenderness and pathos, coming out of her very heart. 'I guessed it long—oh, long ago——'

'How did you do that? Whisper, darling—tell me—when did you first think——?'

Is not this the A B C of lovers? and yet her tone implied a little more than the happy divining of the easy secret. She laughed softly—a variety of music in his ear—the two faces were so close.

'You did not think I knew anything about it. I saw you—looking up at my window—the very night of the wedding. Do you remember?' Again Lottie's low happy laugh broke into the middle of her words. 'I could not think what it meant. And then another time before I knew you—and then—— You did not suppose I saw you. I could not believe it,' she said, with a soft sigh of content. Laugh or sigh, what did it matter, they meant the same: the delight of a discovery which was no discovery—the happy right of confessing a consciousness which she dared not have betrayed an hour ago—of being able to speak of it all: the two together, alone in all the

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world, wanting nothing and no one. This was what Lottie meant. But her disclosures struck her lover dumb. What would she say if she knew his real object then? A prima donna who was to make his fortune—a new voice to be produced in an opera! He shuddered as he drew her closer to him, with terror—with compunction, though he had meant no harm. And he loved her now if he did not love her then; with all his heart now—all the more tenderly, he thought, that she had mistaken him, that she had been so innocently deceived.

By this time it had got dark, though they did not observe it; yet not quite dark, for it is rarely dark out of doors under the free skies, as it is within four walls. It was Lottie who suddenly awoke to this fact with a start.

'It must be late—I must go home,' she said. And when she looked about among the ghostly trees which waved and bent overhead, sombre and colourless in the dark—she thought, with a thrill of horror, that hours must have passed since she came here. Rollo too was slightly alarmed. They were neither of them in a condition to measure time; and though so much had happened, it had flown like a moment. They came out from among the trees in the happy gloom, arm-in-arm. Nobody could re-

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cognise them, so dark as it was—and indeed nobody was in the way to recognise them—and the Abbey clock struck as they emerged upon the Dean's Walk, reassuring them. Rollo was still in time for dinner, though Lottie might be too late for tea; and the relief of discovering that it was not so late as they thought gave them an excuse for lingering. He walked to the Lodges with her, and then she turned back with him; and finally they strayed round the Abbey in the darkness, hidden by it, yet not so entirely hidden as they thought. Only one little jar came to the perfect blessedness of this progress homeward.

'Shall you tell them?' Lottie whispered, just before she took leave of her lover, with a movement of her hand towards the Deanery.

This gave Rollo a *serrement de cœur*. He replied hastily, 'Not to-night,' with something like a shiver, and then he added, 'Where shall I see you to-morrow?'

This question struck Lottie with the same shock and jar of feeling. Would not he come and claim her to-morrow? This was what she had thought. She did not know what to reply, and a sudden sensation of undefined trouble—of evil not yet so entirely over as she hoped—came into her mind; but he added, before she could speak—

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'In the old place—that blessed corner which I love better than any other in the world. Will you come while everybody is at the Abbey, Lottie? for we must talk over everything.'

This melted the little momentary vexation away, and she promised. And thus they parted perforce—opposite Captain Despard's door. How glad Lottie was that the door was open! It stood open all through the summer, and the habits of the summer were scarcely over. By the light in the dining-room downstairs and the sound of the voices she divined that tea was not yet over. But she was not able to encounter Mrs. Despard to-night. She did not want to see anyone. Her heart was still so full of delicious tumult, her eyes of sweet tears. She had gone out so sorrowful, so indignant, not knowing what was to become of her. And now she knew what was to become of her—the most beautiful, happy fate. He had said he was poor. What did it matter if he was poor? Was she not used to that? Lottie knew, and said to herself with secret joy, that she was the right wife for a poor man. He might have got the noblest of brides, and she would not have been so fit for him; but *she* was fit for that post if ever a young woman was. She would take care of the little he had, which one might be sure he would never do himself—he was too

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generous, too kind for that; Lottie loved him for his prodigality, even while she determined to control it. She would take care of him and do everything for him, as no woman used to wealth could do. And she would spur him on so that he should do great things—things which he had not done heretofore, only because he had not stimulus enough. He should have stimulus enough now, with a wife who would exult in all he did, and support him with sympathy and help. It was not any passive position that she mapped out for herself. She knew what it meant to be poor, far better than Rollo did. And she did not mind it. Why should she mind it? She had been used to it all her life. She would not care what she did. But he should never have to blush for his wife as a drudge. She would never forget her position, and his position, which was so much greater than hers. This was the first time that Lottie thought of his position. She did so now with a heightening of colour, and louder throb of her heart. By this time she was sitting in her own room without even a candle, glad of the seclusion and of the darkness in which she could think, unbetrayed even to herself. Her heart gave a bound, and a flush came to her cheek. There could be no doubt now about her position. No one could dream, no one could think

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that Rollo's wife was ever to be looked down upon. This gave her a distinct thrill of pleasure; and then she passed it by, to return to a dearer subject—Himself! how anxious he had been! as if it were possible she could have resisted his love. He had wooed her, she thought, as if she had been a princess—doubling Lottie's happiness by doing in this respect the thing she felt to be most right and fit, though, oh! so unnecessary in respect to herself! Could he really have any doubt how it would turn out? The thought of this humility in her hero brought tears of love and happiness to Lottie's eyes. Was she the same girl who had sat here in gloom and darkness only last night, wondering what was to become of her? But how was she to know how soon fate would unfold like a flower, and show her what was in store for her? How happy she was—how good, how thankful to God—how charitable to others! She could have gone downstairs and said something kind even to Polly, had it not been for fear of betraying herself. Everything that was tender and sweet blossomed out in her heart. She was so happy. Is not that the moment in which the heart is most pure, most kind, most humble and tender? God's hand seemed to be touching her, blessing her—and she in her turn was ready to bless all the world.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THOUGHT.

THE appearance of the new Mrs. Despard in the Abbey made a very great impression. The brilliancy of her blue silk and the bushiness of her orange-blossoms were calculated to strike awe into all beholders. There was scarcely a lady within the Precincts who did not feel herself personally insulted by the appearance of the milliner girl flaunting in her bridal finery and taking her place by right among them. As for the wives of the Chevaliers, their indignation was too great for words. Mingled curiosity and enmity had brought them out in larger numbers than usual, to see the creature, if she was so lost to every feeling of shame as to show herself; and it is scarcely necessary to say that Polly was in that particular entirely lost to every feeling of shame. She came in with her Captain, clinging to his arm, and whispering to him, even in the sacred quiet of the Abbey, and as the pair were late, and almost the entire congregation had assembled, nothing was wanting to

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the full enjoyment of her triumph. Polly felt, when she raised her head, after that momentary homage to the sacred place which even in her state of excitement she felt bound to make, that one object of her life was attained, that everybody was staring at her, and that in her blue silk she was more the centre of regard than the Dean himself under his canopy, or the Minor Canon just about to begin the service, who perceptibly paused, in acknowledgment of the little rustle and commotion which accompanied her entrance. The feelings of the ladies among whom this intruder pushed her way may be imagined. It was all that Mrs. O'Shaughnessy could do, she said afterwards, to refrain from throwing her hymn-book at the head of the jaunty Captain, as he handed his bride into her place, before taking his own among his brother Chevaliers. The ladies in the Abbey were divided from their partners, being placed in a lower row, and to see the Captain pass on to his stall with a swing of elation in his step after handing his bride to her seat, was enough to make any veteran blaspheme. Why should a man be so proud of himself because he has got a new wife? The imbecile glow of vanity and self-congratulation which in such circumstances comes over the countenance, nay, the entire person, even of the wisest, conveys exasperation to every looker-on.

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The sentiment of indignation, however, against Captain Despard was mingled with pity; but scarcely even contempt sufficed to soften the feeling with which Polly in her blue silk was universally regarded. Polly was an intruder, an aggressor. The very way in which she tossed her head upwards with its bristling crown of artificial flowers was an offence. The ladies might have their little differences now and then, and it was an undoubted fact that Mrs. Dalrymple, for instance, who was very well connected, had never been able to endure Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, who had no connections at all; but now they all clung together as with one impulse. They crowded upon each other in the seat, so as to leave a clear space between them and Polly, who, unabashed, took full advantage of it, and spread out her flounces, her blue silken skirts around her, with a rustle of defiance. Mrs. Temple was the one who was left next to Mrs. Despard. This lady, who took no notice at first, soon roused up, and putting on her spectacles, looked very seriously at the intruder. Polly faced round upon her, with dauntless readiness, but Mrs. Temple's look was so serious, that even Polly felt somewhat discomfited. She felt this new observer's eyes upon her all the time. 'Who was that old woman who stared at me so?' she asked, scarcely taking the

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trouble to whisper, as her husband led her round the nave while the voluntary was being played. 'That! that's the wife of an old idiot who gives himself no end of airs,' said the Captain. 'I thought as much,' said Polly, tossing her head, 'but she'll find I can stare just as well as she can. Two can play at that game.' She spoke so loudly that some of the people near said, 'Hush-sh!' The Signor was just then playing a very delicate cadenza in the minor key.

Mrs. Temple took her old husband's arm without a word, and went straight home. He had not himself been at the service, but met her at the door; where he too saw the bride in her blue silk. The old Captain did nothing but shake his head. He could not trust himself to speak. 'What are things coming to?' he said at last, as they got within their own door. 'When that young fellow was made a Chevalier, I said nothing could come of it but mischief to the community.' Captain Despard, being only fifty, was a young fellow to this veteran. 'Never mind the community,' said Mrs. Temple, which was a bold thing to say. It was getting late in the October afternoon, and within the little sitting-rooms of the Lodges it seemed dark, coming in even from the grey afternoon skies outside. Mrs. Temple rang for

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the lamp before she went upstairs to take off her bonnet. She was very full of thought, and sighed as she went. Her own girl, for whom she would so gladly have died, was gone, leaving father and mother desolate—and here was another poor girl who lived, but had no one to care for her. Strange are the decrees of Providence. Mrs. Temple sighed as she came downstairs again to where her old Captain sat gazing at the lamp with a sorrowful face. 'Yes, my dear,' he said as she came in, 'you were right to say never mind the community. After all, I suppose there is no community in the world that has not its black sheep. Nobody will be so foolish as to confound *us* with such a fellow; but when I think of that poor girl——'

'That is what I have been thinking of,' said Mrs. Temple; 'but perhaps,' she added, still unwilling to betray her interest in Lottie, that interest which was half opposition, 'perhaps she may not feel it so much as we suppose.'

'Feel it! I have not liked to say very much about her, my dear. She reminds me so of our own——and I know you could not bear to talk of that,' said the good Captain, innocent of the fact that he had talked of little else for months past. 'But if you only knew her better! There is something in her walk—in the turn of her

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head—that so reminds me—but I never liked to say much about it. You must not think she does not feel it. I met her and was talking with her just before I came for you. But for leaving you alone I should have taken her for a walk; it would have done her good. I believe she rushed off to the Slopes after all.'

'I do not think she would get much good on the Slopes,' said Mrs. Temple, thinking of the little wind of gossip about Mr. Rollo Ridsdale which had begun to breathe about the Lodges.

'She would get fresh air—and quiet; she likes that; she is a very thoughtful girl, my dear—very serious, just like our own poor——. You must forgive me if I am always seeing resemblances. Lottie is very fond of the twilight. I have gone with her so often I know her tastes. Many a time I have done the same with——. When I feel her little arm in mine, I could almost think sometimes that other days have come back.'

The shadow of Mrs. Temple's cap quivered on the wall. The thought of the little arm in his, the other days, which this simple touch brought back, was not sweet but terrible to her. A film floated before her eyes, and something choking and intolerable rose in her throat. 'I do not suppose,' she said hastily, 'that a girl brought up like that can mind as one thinks.'

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The Captain shook his head. 'I wish you knew her better,' he said, with that soft answer which turns away irritation. The servant-maid came in with the tray at this moment, and Mrs. Temple began to pour out the tea. She was a little tired, having had many things to do that day, and it occurred to her suddenly that to lean back in her easy-chair as the Captain was doing, and to have her cup of tea brought to her, would be sweet. To have some one to wait upon her tenderly and read her wishes in her eyes, and divine her thoughts before they came to her lips, that would be sweet. But could anyone do that except a child, could anything but love do it, and that sacred influence which is in the blood, the same blood running in the different veins of parent and child? These thoughts went through her mind without anybody being the wiser. She gave her husband his tea, and sat down in her turn to rest a little. There was nothing said in the still little room. The two together, did not they know all each other's thoughts and wishes and recollections? They were old, and what could happen to them except the going out to the Abbey, the coming in to tea? But if there had been three instead of two—and one young, with all a dawning world before her feet—everything would have borne a very different aspect. Ah! Mrs. Temple

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moved quickly, as she had the habit of doing when that recollection, always present to her mind, struck suddenly like a new blow. And here was a creature, helpless, forlorn, without a mother to fly to. The mother who had no child stood doubtful between earth and heaven, asking, speechless, what she was to do: pass by on the other side as if there was no mother in her? or pardon God for taking her child, and hold out her hand to His? She did not know what to do. Things were not easy for her as for her husband. It was cruel of this girl even to live, to pass by a poor woman's windows who had lost her child; yet what was the woman to do when this creature who was living, who was an offence to her, was in trouble? Let her sink and never hold out a hand? But what then would the other girl in heaven think of her mother? Mrs. Temple was torn by this conflict of which she gave no sign, while perhaps the old Captain in his kind and simple heart, yearning over the young creature who was so helpless and desolate, was unjust to his wife and thought her less than kind.

And it was not only in Captain Temple's house that Polly's appearance was the cause of excitement. The Signor put his hand upon the arm of his young assistant as they went out together by the north door. 'Did you see them?'

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he said, with meaning. Young Purcell was pale with excitement. He had done nothing but watch Polly promenading through the nave on her husband's arm, and the very fact of Lottie's superiority to himself made him feel with more horror the impossibility of any harmony between her and Polly, whom he considered so much inferior to himself. He had watched her from the organ-loft, while the Signor played the voluntary, with feelings indescribable; and so did his mother, who was also in the Abbey, and who gaped at the fine young woman with a mixture of consternation and admiration, by no means sure of her inferiority, yet feeling that a crisis had arrived, and that whatever Miss Despard might have said before, she could not but be glad now of any offer of an 'ome. Mrs. Purcell did not stay for the voluntary, but went home quickly to see after 'her dinner,' very full of thought, and tremulous with expectation. The young lady was proud, she would not have anything to say to John before—but now, no doubt she would send for him and all would be settled. The housekeeper knew that a young stepmother was a strong argument against the peace of a girl who had been used to have everything her own way, and she felt with a tremor of her heart, half pride, half pain, that now at last she would

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have to resign her boy, and see him pass from beyond her ken into those regions of gentility with which the Signor's housekeeper had nothing to do. Very likely John, or John's wife who was 'such a lady,' would want her to leave her comfortable situation. Mrs. Purcell did not like the idea of it, but still, if it would help to make her boy happy—perhaps even it might remove a stumbling-block out of John's way if she were to take it into her own hands, and give up her situation. The thought made her heart heavy, for she liked her place, and the Signor, and her comfortable rooms, and the power of laying by a little money. But John was the first person to be considered. What could a young lady object to in his position? *he* was all that a gentleman could wish to be; but a mother who was in service might no doubt be an objection. Mrs. Purcell made up her mind hurriedly, that if it proved needful she would not wait to be asked, but would herself take the initiative and make the sacrifice; but she did so with a heavy heart. To give up not only her boy, who, when he was married, would not, she knew, be much more to his mother, but her occupation likewise, and her chief comforts, and her master who was, in a way, like another son to her, a foster-son, much greater and richer than she, but still dependent on her for his com-

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fort—it was hard—but still she could do it for her John's sake. Meanwhile her John, feeling the Signor's hand heavy with meaning on his arm, answered with tremulous excitement, 'Yes —— I saw it. It is terrible, terrible! a desecration. To think she should have to put up with *that* even for a day!'

'I wonder what will be the issue,' said the Signor, meditatively. 'Her heart is not in her work now. If she becomes an artist, it will be against her will—Art is not what she is thinking of. I wonder what will come of it. Will she feel the hollowness of this world and throw herself into her profession, or will she——'

'Master,' said the young musician, fervently, 'sooner or later she will turn to me. It is not possible that a man could love a young lady as I do, and have an 'ome to offer her, as I have——'

Purcell was educated—he did not forget his h's in general; but how many people are there who, beguiled by that familiar phrase, forget all precautions, and plunge recklessly into the pitfall of an 'ome!

'Yóu think so?' said the Signor. He did not himself put any confidence in this result, and was even surprised, after his recent experience, that the young man should be sanguine; but still, after all, who ought to have such true

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intuitions as the hero himself? and there is no telling what perseverance mingled with enthusiasm may do. The Signor was not satisfied with his pupil. She would not devote herself to her work as he wished. She had no abstract devotion to art, as art. The Signor felt, musing over it, that it was possible she might take to it more warmly if by any chance she became Purcell's wife. John was a very good fellow, and when he was disappointed, the Signor was very angry with Lottie; but, still, he thought it probable that Lottie, if she married him, would not find much to satisfy her in Purcell, and, therefore, would be driven to art. And of all results that could be attained, was not this the best? In the meantime, however, he was very doubtful whether by this means it ever would be attained.

'Yes, master,' said the young man; 'how can I help thinking so? I can give her, if not very much, at least independence and the comforts of an 'ome. She would not be dragged down by anything about me. My mother's position may be doubtful,' he said, with passing embarrassment; 'but you have been so good, you have never made her like a common servant, and at Sturminster nobody need ever know.'

'Your mother has been very good, and done

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a great deal for you; you must never let anyone ignore your mother.'

'Certainly not,' said the young man. 'She *is* my mother; that ought to be enough for anybody. And I shall have her come to see me the same as if she were a duchess; but, still, there is no need of publishing to everybody what she is when she is at home.'

'That is true, that is true,' said the Signor. 'Then you really think there is a chance that this is how it will end?'

'Master,' said Purcell, pausing at the door before they entered. It was one of the Italian traditions which had lingered in the Signor's habitual bearing, to stand still now and then as he was walking, by way of giving emphasis to a sentence. They paused now, looking at each other before they went in, and the colour came to the young fellow's face. 'Master,' he said, 'it may look self-sufficient—but how can it end otherwise? There is no one else who will offer her what I can offer her; and it would be like saying she had no sense, which is very far from the case, to think she would stand out for ever. She is a lady, she is above me in birth; but, thanks to you, I know how to behave like a gentleman; and surely, sooner or later, this is how it must end.'

'Amen, with all my heart,' said the Signor,

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turning in at the door, which old Pick held open behind, waiting, as one who knew his master's way.

It was Mr. Ashford who had intoned the service that afternoon, and his attention had been so caught by Polly's entrance that he had made a kind of stumble in the beginning—a pause which was perceptible. After that, during the singing of the anthem and at other moments when his attention was free, he had looked down upon that gorgeous apparition from his high desk with a look of compassion on his face. The compassion, it is needless to say, was not for Polly, who wanted none of it. He watched her behind his book, or behind the hand which supported his head, with the most curious alarmed attention. And when he passed her with her husband going out, Mr. Ashford looked at her in a way which Polly thought to be flattering. 'That's one as takes an interest in us,' she said. 'It's Ashford, the Minor Canon. It must be you he takes an interest in,' whispered the Captain, and Polly laughed and tossed her head. Mr. Ashford went home with the same strange look on his face, softened, and touched, and pitiful. 'Poor thing,' he said to himself, 'poor girl!' and when he got in he sat for a long time in the centre window, in the dark, looking out, and trying to

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think out some way of help. What could he do for her? Poor thing! with all her better instincts and higher feelings, with her impulse of taking care of everybody and keeping her father and brother right, what would become of her now? Mr. Ashford asked himself, with many an anxious thought, what could be done? A man could do nothing—where it was a girl that was in the case a man was more helpless than a baby. He could do nothing to help her; he could not even show his sympathy without probably doing more harm than good to the sufferer. He sat in the window-seat, gazing out on the dusk and the dim horizon, as if they could help him in his musings. If he had only had a mother or sister—any woman to whom he could have appealed, he thought he must have done so on behalf of this girl. But he had neither sister nor mother. He was a man very much alone in the world. He had a brother, a poor clergyman, with a large family, and a wife, who would not understand in the least why Ernest should interest himself in a stranger—*a girl.* If he wanted some one to spend his money upon, why not take one of the children? he thought he heard her say; and certainly she would not understand, much less respond to, any appeal he could make to *her.* What could he do? If any other suggestion

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swept across Mr. Ashford's face in the dark or through his heart, nobody was there to see or divine it. He sat thus without ringing for his lamp till it was quite late, and was much discomposed to be found sitting in the dark when a messenger arrived with a note from the Deanery about the extra service for the next saint's-day. He was annoyed to be found so, being conscious, perhaps, of reasons for the vigil which he would not have cared to enter upon; for he was shy and sensitive, and it had often happened to him to be laughed at, because of his undue anxiety about others. 'What is it to you?' had been often said to him, and never with more occasion than now. For, after all, what did it matter to the Minor Canon what became of Lottie Despard? Whether she and her stepmother should 'get on' together, or if they should never 'get on,' but yet might manage to live under the same roof a cat-and-doggish life—what was it to him? One way or other, it would not take sixpence out of his pocket, or affect his comfort in any way. But yet he could not get it out of his head. No one in the house had thought of coming to his room to light his lamp, to see that all was in order for him. He was not served with precision, as was the Signor, for he was fond of saving his servants trouble and making excuses for them.

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And when the man came from the Deanery and followed the maid into the study, where she went groping, declaring that her master was not at home, the Minor Canon was uncomfortable, finding himself thus taken by surprise. 'You need not wait for an answer. I will send one in the morning,' he said, when the candles on the writing-table had been lit with a match, and he had read the note. He felt that his confused and troubled thoughts might be read in his eyes. But nobody had any clue to the subject of these thinkings; and how could anyone suspect that it was a matter of such absolute indifference to himself that was occupying his thoughts—a thing with which he had nothing in the world to do?

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CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT ROLLO HAD TO MARRY ON.

THE moment after a man has made a proposal of marriage, and has been accepted, is not always a moment of unmitigated blessedness. There are ups and downs in the whole business from beginning to end. Sometimes the man has the best of it, and sometimes the woman. When either side has betrayed itself without a response on the other, when the man seems to waver in his privilege of choice, when the woman hesitates in her crowning prerogative of acceptance or rejection, then there are intervals on either side which are not enviable; but when all these preliminaries are over, and the explanation has been made, and the two understand each other—then the lady's position is, for the first few days at least, the most agreeable. She has no parents to interview, no pecuniary investigations to submit to, nor has she to enter upon the question of ways and means, settlements and income for the future. But when a man who knows he has nothing to marry upon

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is beguiled by circumstances, by a sudden emergency, or by strain of feeling into the momentous offer, and, after the first enthusiasm of acceptance, looks himself in the face, as it were, and asks himself how it is to be done, there is something terrible in the hours that follow. How was it to be done? Rollo Ridsdale left Lottie at her door, and went across the road towards the Deanery in a state of mind which was indescribable. He was not an immaculate man, nor had he now spoken of love for the first time; but yet he was real in his love, and the response had been sweet to him—sweet and terrible, as conveying every risk and danger that life could bring, as well as every delight. He had lingered with his love until the last available moment, and yet it was a relief to turn his back upon her, to go away into the chaos of his own life and try to find a way out of this maze in which he had involved himself. How was he to marry? what was he to do? He felt giddy as he walked along, steadily enough to outward seeming, but in his soul groping like a blind man. He had asked Lottie Despard to marry him, and she had consented. He wanted nothing better than her companionship, her love, the delight and comfort of her to be his own; but, good heavens!—but, by Jove!—but, in the name of

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everything worth swearing by—how was it to be done?—how was he to marry? what was he to do? The happiness was delicious—it was a taste of Paradise, a whiff of Elysium—but——. Rollo did not know where he was going as he crossed the Dean's Walk. He went—steadily enough, his legs carrying him, his knowledge of the place guiding him mechanically, but his whole soul in a maze of thought. How was he to do it? How could he, a man with nothing, not much better than an adventurer, living upon chances and windfalls—how could he weight himself with the support of another—marry a wife? It was preposterous, it was terrible—yet it was sweet. Poor child, she was in want of his arm to shelter her, in want of some one to take care of her, and he could not tolerate the idea that anyone but himself should give her the succour she needed; but how was he to do it? The question seemed to get into the air and whisper round him—how was he to do it? He had nothing, or what to such a man was nothing, and worse than nothing. He managed to live no one could tell how. True, in living he did not know how Rollo managed to spend a good deal of money—more than many a family is reared upon; but there is proportion in everything, and he never could tell from one year's end to another how he had got through.

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And he had asked a girl to marry him! He groaned within himself when he came back to this centre thought, this pivot of all his reflections, though it was sweet. He had asked her to marry him; he had pledged himself to take her away out of her troubles, to throw open a refuge to her, to make her escape practicable: speedily, certainly, easily, so far as she knew—and how was he to do it? If the question went through his mind once, it flew and circled in wavering rounds about him, like a moth or a bat in summer, a hundred times at least as he went from the Chevalier's lodge to the Deanery door. He had no time for thinking, since the hour of dinner approached, and the Dean waited for no one; but he thought and thought all the same. What was he to do? He marry! how was he to do it? Yet it must be done. He did nothing but ask himself this while he brushed his hair and tied his evening tie. He had nothing, not a penny—he had a valet and a dressing-case, with gold tops to all the bottles, and the most expensive clothes from the dearest tailor—but he had nothing, and everybody knew that he had nothing. The situation was appalling. A cold dew came out on his forehead; he to do such a thing! but yet he had done it—he had committed himself—and now the question that remained was—not how to get

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out of it, which under any other circumstances would have been his clear duty, but how to do it? This was the problem he tried to solve while he was dressing, which flitted about his head while he sat at dinner, between every mouthful of his soup, and fluttered all through the dessert. How was he to do it? And when the evening was over—when Lady Caroline had gone to bed, and the Dean to his study, Rollo at length ventured out into the Deanery garden with his cigar, in spite of the black looks of Mr. Jeremie, who wanted to shut up the house and get to bed himself at a reasonable hour, as a dean's butler has a right to do.

It was cold—but he did not feel the cold—and the wind was still strong, blowing the black branches wildly about the leaden sky. The Dean's garden was bounded by the Slopes, only a low and massive grey wall, as old as the buttresses amid which the lawn was set, separating it from the larger grounds, which were open to the community—and Rollo leaning on that wall could almost see the spot where he had sat with Lottie, when she had clasped her hands on his arm, leaning upon him with delicious trust, and giving up all her future into his hands. Even then what a difference there had been between them!—she throwing herself upon him in utter faith and confidence, feeling

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herself delivered completely and at once from all the troubles that overwhelmed her; while he, even in the thrill of pleasure which that soft weight and pressure gave him, felt his heart jump with such sudden alarm as words could not describe. Now, when he thought it over, the alarm was more than the pleasure. Lottie, retired into her little chamber, was at that hour going over the whole scene with the tenderest happiness and reliance—feeling safe with him, feeling free of all responsibility, not even forecasting the future, safe and relieved from all the anxieties of the past, caring for nothing but this moment, this exquisite climax of life, this perfect union that had begun and was never to end. Very, very different were Rollo's thoughts. How was he to do it? Marry! the very idea seemed impossible. It involved disclosure, and disclosure would be madness. What would his relations say to him?—what would his friends say to him? His tradesmen would send in their bills, his associates would contemplate him with the very horror of astonishment. Ridsdale married! as well cut his throat at once. Had he ever thought of the little *ménage* on which Lottie's thoughts (had they been free to plan anything) would have dwelt with simple pride and happiness, he would have been disposed really to cut his throat. In such a case

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Lottie would have been sure of her own powers —sure that if they were poor she could make their money go twice as far as Rollo by himself could make it go—and could much more than balance her share of the expenses by the housewifely powers which it would have been her delight and her ambition to exercise. But to Rollo love in a cottage was a simple folly, meaning nothing. The very idea was so foreign to him that it never entered into his mind at all. What did enter into his mind, as the only hope in the blank of the future, was of a very different description. It was the original idea which had first of all moved him towards this girl, who gradually had awakened within him so many other sentiments: her voice. Should he be able to produce this as he hoped, then there would be a way of escape from the difficulty. The Manager had behaved like a fool, but Rollo had not changed his opinion. Though he had fallen in love with the singer, and his sentiments in regard to her had thus been modified, he had never changed his opinion. She possessed a magnificent organ; and though (which seemed to him very strange) Handel at present was her only inspiration, yet he felt that with proper care that voice could do anything, and that in it might yet lie all the elements of fortune. Casting about around all his horizon

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for something like salvation, this was the only light that Rollo perceived. It, perhaps, was not the most desirable of lights. To marry a singer in full heyday of her powers, admired by all the world, and making a great deal of money, was not a thing that any younger son would hesitate to do; but an unknown singer, with all her way to make, and her very education still so imperfect, that was a very different matter; but still it was the only chance. In former times, perhaps, a man would have thought it necessary to pretend at least a desire to snatch his bride from the exposure of publicity, from the stage, or even from the concert-room—a determination to work for her rather than to let her work for him; but along with circumstances sentiments change, and the desire of women for work is apt to be supported from an undesirable side by those who once would have thought their honour concerned in making women's work unnecessary. In civilisation there can be no advance without its attendant drawback. Mr. Ridsdale had fallen in love, a thing no young man can entirely guard against, and he had engaged to marry Lottie Despard, partly because he was in love with her, partly because she was in want of protection and succour. But he did not know in what way he could keep a wife; and short of breaking his word

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and abandoning her altogether (things which at this moment it seemed utterly impossible to do), what other way was open to him than to consider how his wife could keep him? This was a great deal more easy. He had nothing—no money, no profession—but she had a profession, a something which was worth a great deal of money, which only required cultivation to be as good as a fortune. Rollo's heart perceptibly lightened as he thought of this. It did not make the social difficulties much easier, or soften the troubles which he must inevitably have with his family; but still, whereas the other matter had been impossible, this brought it within the range of things that could be contemplated. He could not refrain from one sigh (in the undercurrent of his mind—not dwelt upon or even acknowledged, a thing which he would have been ashamed of had he admitted it to himself)—one sigh that the idea of marriage had come in at all. She might have found in him all the succour, all the companionship, all the support she wanted without *that*; and it would have done her no harm in her after career. But that was a secret thought—an inadvertence, a thing which he dared not permit himself to think, as it were, in the daylight, in his own full knowledge. He knew very well what a fool he would appear to everybody—

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how the idea that he, Rollo, with all his experience, should be thus taken in at last, would cause infinite surprise and laughter among his friends—but still there came a gleam of possibility into the matter when he thought of Lottie's gift. By that means they might do it. It was not quite out of the question, quite impossible. Rollo had been so lost in thought that he had not seen Mr. Jeremie looking out from the window through which he had gone into the garden; but as he arrived at this, which was a kind of conclusion, if not a very satisfactory one, he became at last aware of the respectable butler's anxiety.

'Her ladyship, sir, don't hold with leaving the windows open,' said Mr. Jeremie, who did not hold with staying out of bed to attend upon a young man's vagaries. There had been nothing of this kind in Miss Augusta's time—not even when Mr. Daventry came courting. Rollo tossed the end of his cigar over the wall and came in, somewhat relieved in his mind, though the relief was not very great. It left all the immediate question unsolved—what his family would say, and what was to be done in the meantime—but it gave a feeble light of possibility in the future. He had calculated on Lottie's voice to make his fortune when he thought of it only as a speculator. He had

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much more right to look upon her as likely to make his fortune now.

In the morning the same thought was the first in Rollo's mind; but the faint light of hope it gave was surrounded by clouds that were full of trouble. Supposing that in the course of time, when she was thoroughly established in her profession, trained and started, she could manage to attain that most necessary thing called an income, with which to meet the world —this was a contingency which still lay in the future; whereas it might be necessary to act at once. The very urgency and anxiety of Rollo's thoughts will show that he neither wanted to abandon Lottie nor to allow her to guess that he was alarmed by his engagement to her. The whole scope and object of his deliberations was to make the thing possible. But for this why should he have troubled himself about it at all? He might have 'let things take their course'—he might have gone on enjoying the delights of love-making, and all a lover's privileges, without going any further. Lottie was not the kind of girl who ever would have hurried matters, or insisted upon the engagement being kept. He knew well enough that she would never 'pull him up.' But he was in love with Lottie—he wanted to deliver her from her troubles—he wanted to have her for

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his own—if he could only see how it was to be done. Evidently there were various conditions which must be insisted on—which Lottie must yield to. Public notice must not be called to the tie between them more than was absolutely necessary. Everything must be conducted carefully and privately—not to make any scandal—and not to compel the attention of his noble family. Rollo did not want to be sent for by his father, to be remonstrated with by his elder brother, to have all his relatives preaching sermons to him. Even his aunt Caroline, passive, easy-going soul—even she would be roused, he felt, to violence, could she divine what was in the air. Marry Miss Despard! the idea would drive her out of all the senses she possessed. Kind as she was, and calm as she was, Rollo felt that in such circumstances she would no longer be either kind or calm; and if even Lady Caroline were driven to bay, what would be the effect of such a step on Lord Courtland, who had no calm of nature with which to meet the revelation? Therefore his heart was heavy as he went out, as soon as the bells had ceased ringing for matins, to meet his love on the Slopes. His heart was heavy, yet he was not a cool or indifferent lover. The thought of seeing her again was sweet to him; but the cares were many, and he did not know

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how to put into language which would not vex or hurt her the things that must be said. He tried to wrap them up in honeyed words, but he was not very successful; and at last he decided to leave it all to Providence—to take no thought for what he was to say. 'The words will be put into my mouth at the right time,' he said to himself piously. He could not exactly forecast what shape the conversation might take, or how this special subject should be introduced. He would not settle what he had to say, but would leave it to fate.

The morning sunshine lay as usual unbroken upon the Dean's Walk. It had been feeble and fitful in the morning, as sunshine has often begun to be in October, but now had warmed into riper glory. The paths on the Slopes were strewed with fallen leaves, which the winds of last night had blown about in clouds. Rollo was first at the trysting-place; and when he saw Lottie appear suddenly round the bole of the big elm-tree, she seemed to be walking to him, her foot all light and noiseless, upon a path of gold. Her steps seemed to have a fairy tinkle upon that yellow pavement. The movement of her figure was like music, with a flowing liquid measure in it. The little veil that dropped over her hat, the ribbons at her neck, the soft sweep of her dark merino gown, commonest

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yet prettiest of fabrics, all united in one soft line. There was nobody by, and it was the first heavenly morning upon which they had belonged to each other. She came to him as if out of paradise, out of heaven, all radiant with happiness and celestial trust and love. A glow of tenderness and gladness came over the young man. He forgot all about the difficulties, about money, about his family, about how they were to live and what was to be done. He went to meet her, ardent and eager, forgetting everything but herself. It was the *vita nuova* all over again—a new earth and new skies. It seemed to both of them that they had never lived before, that this was the birthday of a glorified existence. Even last night, in the agitation of their happiness, had not been like this first new day. When they stepped into each other's sight, realising the mutual property, the mutual right, the incomprehensible sweetness of belonging to each other, everything else seemed to be swept out of the world. There was nothing visible but themselves, the sweet sky, and genial air: the leaves dropping softly, all crimson and golden, the sun shining on them with a sympathetic surprise of pleasure. For the moment, even to the young man of the world, everything was simple, primitive, and true, all complication and conventionalities swept

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away; and if so to Rollo, how much more to Lottie, thus advancing sweetly, with a soft measure in her step, not hurried or eager, but in modest faith and innocence, into her lover's arms!

And, lo! in a moment all his calculations proved needless. Instead of talking seriously to each other, making their mutual arrangements, deciding what was to be done, as would have been far the wisest way of employing the solitude of this sweet morning, which seemed to brighten expressly for them—what did the two do but fall into an aimless delicious whispering about their two happy selves, and nothing more! They had things to say to each other which came by stress of nature, and had to be said, yet were nothing—while the things of real importance were thrust aside. They fell a-gossiping about themselves, about each other, going over all the old ground, repeating the last evening's tender follies, about—when you first began to think—and when I first knew—and what had been in the one heart and in the other, when both had to talk of other things, and make no sign. What need to follow all the course of that foolishness? There was nothing in earth or heaven so deeply interesting to Lottie as to hear how Rollo was thinking

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of her while he stood and talked to somebody else, watching her from far; and how his heart would beat when he saw her coming, and how he blasphemed old Captain Temple, yet blessed him next moment for bringing her here; and what he had really meant when he said this and that, which had perplexed her at the time; nor to Rollo than to know how she had watched for him, and looked for his sympathy, and felt herself backed up and supported the moment he appeared. There was not a day of the past month but had its secret history, which each longed to disclose to the other—and scarcely an hour, scarcely a scrap of conversation which did not contain a world of unrevealed meaning to be unfolded and interpreted. Talk of an hour! they had ample enough material for a century without being exhausted; and as for arrangements, as for the (so to speak) business of the matter, who thought of it? For Lottie was not an intelligent young woman, intending to be married, but a happy girl in love; and Rollo, though he knew better, was in love too, and wished for nothing better than these delightful confidences. The hours went by like a moment. They had already been aroused two or three times by the roll of baby carriages propelled by nursemaids before the

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greater volume of music from the Abbey proclaimed that service was over. 'Already!' they both cried, with wonder and dismay; and then, for the first time, there was a pause.

'I had so much to talk to you about,' he said, 'and we have not had time to say a word, have we? Ah! when can we have a good long time to ourselves? Can you escape your Captain to-night, my darling? I should like to shake him by the hand, to thank him for taking care of you; but couldn't you escape from him, my Lottie, to-night?'

Lottie grew a little pale; her heart sank, not with distrust, but with perhaps a little, a very little disappointment. Was this still how it was to be? Just the same anxious diplomacies to secure a meeting, the same risks and chances? This gave her a momentary chill. 'It is very difficult,' she said. 'He is the only one I have to take care of me. He would think it unkind.'

'You must not say now the only one, my Lottie—not the only one—my substitute for a little while, who will soon have to give me up his place.'

'But he will not like to give it up now; not till he knows; perhaps not even then—for his daughter, you know——'

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'Ah! it was she who married Dropmore. Lottie, my love, my darling, I cannot live through the evening without you. Could you not come again, at the same time as last night? It is early dark, heaven be praised. Take your walk with him, and then give him the slip, and come here, sweet, here to me. I shall be watching, counting the moments. It is bad enough to be obliged to get through the day without you. Ah! it is the Signor's day. The Signor is all rapt up in his music. He will never suspect anything. I shall be able to see you at least, to hear you, to look at you, my lovely darling——'

After a moment said Lottie, 'That was one thing I wanted to ask you about. You know why the Signor gives me lessons. Will it be right *now* to go on with him? *now* that everything is changed? Should not I give them up?'

'Give them up!' cried Rollo, with a look of dismay. 'My darling, what are you thinking of? They are more necessary, more important than ever. Of course, we will pay for them after. Oh! no fear but he will be repaid; but no, no, my love, my sweet, you must not give them up!'

She looked at him with something like

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anxiety in her eyes, not knowing what he could mean. What was it? Lottie could not but feel a little disappointed. It seemed that everything was to go on just the same as before.

'I shall see you there,' he said. 'So long as we are in the same place everything is sweet; and I have always taken so much interest in your dear voice that no one can suspect. And to-night you will come—promise me, my darling—just after the service, when it is getting dark?'

'Yes,' she whispered, with a sigh—then started from his side. 'I saw some one among the trees. The old Chevaliers are coming up for their morning walk. Let me go now—you must let me go—Mr. Ridsdale——'

'"Mr. Ridsdale!" How can I let my Lottie go before she has called me by my right name?'

'Oh, I must not stay. I see people coming,' said Lottie, disappointed, troubled, afraid of being seen, yet angry with herself for being afraid. 'Mr. Ridsdale—Rollo, dear Rollo—let me go now——'

'Till it is time for the Signor——' And he did let her go, with a hasty withdrawal on his own part, for unmistakably there were people

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to be seen moving about among the trees; not, indeed, coming near their corner, yet within sight of them. Lottie left him hurriedly, not looking back. She was ashamed, though she had no cause for shame. She ran down the bank to the little path which led to the foot of the hill and to the town. She could not go up and run the risk of being seen going home by the Dean's Walk. She drew her veil over her face, and her cheeks burned with blushes; she was ashamed, though she had done no wrong. And Rollo stood looking down after her, watching her with a still more acute pang. There were things which were very painful to him which did not affect her. That a girl like Lottie should go away alone, unattended, and walk through the street, with no one with her, a long round, annoyed him beyond measure. He ought to have gone with her, or some one ought to be with her. But then what could he do He might as well give up the whole matter at once as betray all he was meditating to his people in this way. But he watched her, leaning over the low parapet, with trouble and shame. The girl whom he loved ought not to go about unattended, and this relic of chivalry, fallen into conventionality, moved him more than greater things. He did not object, like

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Ferdinand, to let his Miranda carry his load for him; but it did trouble him that she should walk through St. Michael's by herself, though in the sweet security of the honest morning. Thus minds differ all over the world.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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